



A DOUBLE WEDDING

BY THE AUTHOR OF
ST OLAVE'S





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A DOUBLE WEDDING.

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E. T. Stephenson

A DOUBLE WEDDING

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“ST. OLAVE’S,” “JANITA’S CROSS,” “ANNETTE,”
ETC. ETC.

“We must not any way
Forget our lady who is gone from us.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, LIMITED,
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T. C. J. Johnson, 8 Apr. 1952.

A DOUBLE WEDDING.

CHAPTER I.

‘AND I also think, David, he should be a married man. You would find it better so.’

It was my mother who said this, as we all—that is herself, my father, my sister Anne and I—held a family conclave in the study one Monday afternoon towards the middle of May. The occasion of this conclave was only an advertisement which my father was sending for insertion in the *Guardian*. But he sought my mother’s help in everything that he did, and espe-

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cially in things that would have their influence upon our family life ; and Anne and I were of an age to be allowed to listen, if not to give our own opinions. Anne, who was the elder, did give hers sometimes, and it was always worth considering. On this matter, however, she held her peace.

The advertisement was for a curate. My father was a man well past middle life, and the parish of Willoughby Clays had not then had the brick-fields taken from it, to be made into a separate district. Up hill and down dale he had to go in all weathers, by day or by night, for he was not a man to disregard duty, whenever or wherever it might call him. Many a time, after a hard day's work in that part of the parish which lay round about the rectory, would he turn out again to Moor-end, three miles away across the hills, to baptize a sick child, or pray with a dying man, and

that when the parish doctor had declined to take leave of his comfortable chair for the supply of their temporal needs. And this readiness to minister to them at all times, though it won for him the deep, reverent love of his parishioners, was telling heavily upon himself. Moreover, he had begun to be worried by a great lady who had lately come into the parish, none other than the newly-married wife of our squire, Mr. Rakeridge of Willoughby Hall, who was herself the daughter of an earl, and who on that account considered herself the spiritual as well as temporal head of the place. Now, worry always told very much more upon my father than work. I believe it does upon most people. And Lady Matilda's endless fidgettings and exhortations, the exasperating way she had of discovering dust and hunting out evil behaviour, had driven him at last to this ex-

treme measure of a curate, a measure to which I believe neither labours nor years would otherwise have compelled him.

‘This is what I have written,’ he said, taking the advertisement out of the envelope to read it aloud to us. The envelope was already addressed and stamped for despatch by that evening’s post :

“Wanted, for a country parish, a curate, priest, views moderate. Stipend, one hundred and fifty. Address Rev. David Haseltine, Willoughby Clays, Broadshire.”

‘I do not think I need spread it out more than that. It will be time enough to enter into particulars by letter when anyone applies. Except that perhaps I ought to say something about the parish being such a very scattered one. That might be a drawback to some men. But that also I could explain by letter.’

It was then that my mother put in her word.

‘And I also think, David, he should be a married man.’

‘That had not occurred to me,’ said my father. ‘I wonder if it would be worth writing the advertisement over again?’

He had folded the paper and put it back into the envelope, but was still considering the question of rewriting it, when Seline Consett, a young girl from India, who had lately come to stay with us, danced into the room in a flutter of excitement.

‘Now, girls, one and both of you, quick change and begone. Yonder is Lady Matilda’s carriage turning into the bend of the road.’

That meant she was coming to call upon us, for that bend of the road only led to the rectory. My father gave a little sigh.

My sister Anne looked annoyed. I would have given half-a-crown to be able to say we were not at home. My mother knitted quietly on, just looking over her spectacles to be sure that it really was Lady Matilda's carriage; for Seline was a mischievous sprite of a girl, who enjoyed nothing so much as getting us into a bustle of expectation and then laughing at us. There was no mistake, however, this time. The carriage was Lady Matilda's, and Lady Matilda herself was in it, sitting bolt upright, and doubtless, as we should find out when it came nearer, with a severe expression upon her countenance.

‘Is it the hassocks, I wonder,’ said Seline, who, not actually belonging to the parish, could view the impending call in the light of something to be made fun of; ‘or has a bit of fringe on the lectern fall got turned the wrong way: or had one of

the choir-boys put his surplice on wrong side out last Sunday : or—but, oh, horror ! don't let us think about it—*can* Mrs. Dumble have carried a flea into the Hall pew ? I believe Lady Matilda would rather have an infidel in the pulpit, Uncle Davie, than a flea in the Hall pew, and if it *should* have happened again !'

For it was a known fact that such a thing had once happened, not the infidel, but the flea ; and her ladyship had driven down the very next morning, with the open carriage and the coachman and the footman, and the rest of the ceremonials, to inquire into the circumstance. Now Mrs. Dumble, who, when she was Mrs. Poslip, had lived with us as cook, was the wife of Jonathan Dumble, the parish clerk, and it was her duty, in connection with her husband, to sweep the church. And it was also her duty to attend to our

poultry, which duty she performed in such an efficient manner that my sister Anne and I, whose perquisite the poultry was, drew quite a tidy little penny of pin-money from the weekly sale of the eggs at Burstborough market. Lady Matilda was convinced that the non-worshipping visitants who found their way into the Hall pew were introduced there by Mrs. Dumble, in consequence of her connection with the rectory farm-yard, and she ‘strongly advised’—which in her case meant compulsion—that either Mrs. Dumble should give up the poultry, or that the church should give up Mrs. Dumble. My father was not disposed to yield on either point, and there was in consequence a little breach between the Hall and the rectory. I always felt a secret dread, as I drew the largest share of profit from the eggs, that Lady Matilda might mention

the subject again whenever she came to call upon us ; and, if she chanced to manifest the least sign of fidgettiness during the morning service, my condition of mind was painful. It could not be the prayers, for my father was a perfect reader ; it could not be the sermon, for his preaching was distinctly above the average. Mrs. Dumble, then, must be responsible.

‘But perhaps,’ continued Seline, ‘it is not anything so bad as that. Perhaps it is only a baby that is dying and wants baptising. I am never distressed when I hear of babies dying, there are such heaps of them in the parish. It had much better be a sick baby than a streak of dust or the other sort of thing. Now, Anne, you need not look so proper. You know you are quite as frightened of Lady Matilda as any of us.’

Anne said nothing, only began to gather up her work.

‘Let us go into the drawing-room,’ said my mother, for the grinding of the carriage-wheels could now be heard upon the road. ‘David, you will come too, will you not?’

‘Certainly,’ replied my father, who was never the man to desert his family in the hour of need. ‘Come along, girls.’

‘Not I,’ laughed Seline. ‘I would as soon sit in the stocks for an hour. I shall run over and see Aunt Sunshine. May I go, auntie?’

Seline was no relation to us, really. It was only a sort of mutual adoption. Her father, Major Consett, was serving with his regiment out in India.

‘By all means.’ And away she went, escaping through the orchard-gate, just as the footman was letting down the carriage-

steps for my lady. Happy Seline! who somehow or other always did manage to get out of anything that was particularly disagreeable, no matter who was left in.

I cannot remember at this distance of time what the occasion of that call proved to be. Most likely, it was something disagreeable, so it is better I should forget it. I only remember, and indeed we all of us had enough need to remember, that when Lady Matilda had gone, and we came back again into the study, my father looked about for the letter which was being discussed when we were interrupted. It was nowhere to be found.

‘The letter? Oh! I fastened it up and posted it,’ said Seline, who had been watching her opportunity to run over from Aunt Sunshine’s as soon as the carriage was out of the way. ‘I quite thought you said it was to go this afternoon. I hope I haven’t

done anything wrong, Uncle Davie, have I?’

‘No, no, child,’ said my father, affectionately. ‘There was only a little alteration we thought of making, but I do not know that it is of any serious consequence.’

My mother made no remark. It was not her way to fuss over a thing that could not be helped. Only I noticed that there was just a touch of disquietude upon her face, as we fell to our various little occupations again, Seline only, who had never heard what the letter was about, chattering away in her usual saucy, magpie fashion, and provoking us girls into bursts of laughter over Lady Matilda’s peculiarities. Seline, in those days, could never see anything but the ludicrous side even of such a serious subject as the mistress of Willoughby Hall.

CHAPTER II.

I MUST go back a little, now.

I do not suppose that in any of the pleasant country rectory-houses nestled amongst their elm-trees, and glebes, and tithe barns in the depths of secluded English parishes, a more peaceful life was ever lived, nor one more free from vexing care, than was ours at Willoughby Clays. Many a time, as I sat in my favourite nook under a bower of ivy by the laurel hedge, where a break in the woods beyond the church opened out the Avon valley, and the spires of Burstborough blue in the sunshine

above it, I have heard passers-by—for that hedge separated us from the high-road—remark :

‘ Well, I *do* call that a pretty place.’

The answer was generally in the affirmative. But once I heard an additional observation which made me smile.

‘ Yes, a pretty place enough. And yet I don’t doubt, if we knew all about it, there’s a skeleton in the cupboard there, too.’

The kindly passer-by, whoever he might be, was mistaken. We knew of no skeleton, unless the recently instituted visits of Lady Matilda might be looked upon as supplying that necessary of life. And even Lady Matilda did not live in our cupboard. When she had gone through her fidgetty little fault-findings, and had been handed by my father, with due courtesy of farewell, into her padded and cushioned car-

riage, we breathed freely, and could even laugh about it. She was not so very much of a skeleton, after all. And she did not want to be one, either. It was for our own good, as faithful nurses say when they nag at and pester the children given into their care. She looked upon us, in common with the church, and the schools, and the poor people, and the brick-fields, and the general details of the parish, Mrs. Dumble included, as part of her social charge, and she dealt with us accordingly.

For the rest, life moved on in a calm, wholesome fashion. My father was never in trouble with his churchwardens; the people brought their tithes regularly, even cheerfully; he never introduced innovations: we just endeavoured, according to our lights, to do our duty in that station of life to which it had pleased Providence to call us. And except for that salutary

interior sense of short-coming, without which life would stagnate in pestilential self-complacency—sense of short-coming which led, at any rate for my father and mother, to constant watchfulness and self-denial—we were in, I think, an entirely right sense, satisfied from ourselves. Solomon says a good man ought to be so satisfied, and I accept his conclusion.

For seven-and-twenty years my father had held that living of Willoughby Clays. He and my mother came to the rectory as bride and bridegroom. She was a Newcourt, of Newcourt House, a pleasant old homestead which we could see amongst the woods between us and the Avon valley. But strangers lived in it now, for my mother and Aunt Sunshine were the only children, and when, shortly after my mother's marriage, both my grandparents died, Aunt Sunshine was not rich enough to

keep up the family home, so she came to a pretty little cottage, which my grandfather had built, just beyond the church plantation, and there she lived a life perhaps even happier in its way than ours.

After my parents' marriage, a son was born to them, who, when he was old enough to laugh and play amongst the churchyard daisies, was laid beneath them. Then came my sister Anne, then myself. That was all; never another son to bring back the little Davie's winning ways, or to keep our name in remembrance amongst the families of the earth.

That loss deeply shadowed my father's life. Year by year, as the sweet Easter-tide drew on, his thoughts seemed to go out towards death and the life which lies beyond. Always on Mid-Lent Sunday his sermons were upon this subject. It was upon that Sunday that little Davie sick-

ened, and it was upon Easter-Day that he died. And now I never see the Lenten lilies touching into gold the edges of our Willoughby brooks, nor catch the scent of the pale primroses as I go down into the heart of the wood, without a tender thought of the little life which I never knew, the little child-life, living still, and one day to be made manifest to me.

But, if that loss shadowed our parents' lives, it did not shadow ours. The little grave in the churchyard brought many sweet thoughts, but no tears. The baby clothes, wrapped in lavender in a locked drawer in my mother's room, were unfolded by us now and then with grave reverence, linked as they were with a might-have-been, which neither my sister nor I could understand. But, though we did not know our own loss, I think we were drawn closer to our parents by the feeling

of what we had to be to them; and, as years passed on, the bands which linked us to each other came closer and closer, until we scarcely ever thought or realised how life could possibly exist under any other conditions than those which had become habitual to us in our quiet country home.

Anne and I were so nearly of an age—there being not a couple of years between us—that we both came out together at the Hunt ball, which was given every October in the Burstborough Assembly Rooms. I am compelled to say that, however much we looked forward to this event—and we did look forward to it as young girls naturally ought—it created no sensation worth mentioning in the neighbourhood. We were dressed exactly alike, in fine white India muslin, draped with real ivy leaves, which we had gathered ourselves from one particular spot on the

Moor-end hills. Such leaves were to be found nowhere else—fine, small, delicate, in long sprays—and in the October time, when we wore them, they were touched by the early frosts into the loveliest tints of olive, and crimson, and gold. When we were dressed, we felt quite satisfied with ourselves, and more than satisfied with our mother, who on that occasion wore black velvet, with a few ornaments of rare Indian silver work. Mrs. Dumble came across on purpose to see us. Her admiration found no words to express itself, a rare thing indeed with that excellent woman. She gazed at us in silence, as we stood side by side on the drawing-room hearth-rug, and then she took out her pocket-handkerchief and slowly withdrew, saying only,

‘ Well, if them two young ladies isn’t a picter, there never was one.’

If we thought that other people were

going to admire us to the same extent, however, we were quite mistaken. India muslin and natural ivy-leaves look very pretty in the privacy of one's own drawing-room, and in the estimation of people who are not accustomed to society; but the frequenters of hunt balls set very little store by such simplicities. In the Burstborough Assembly Rooms we were literally nowhere. We got a few dances each. We enjoyed the splendid dresses, not being in the least envious of them, and the dazzling uniforms of the officers, and the various costumes of the hunts, and we had a certain sense of delight in the palms and the ferns and the expanses of crimson cloth, and the hot-house flowers, and the perfumes, and the decorations, and the banners; but there the thing ended. Our emergence from the chrysalis state of girlhood was by no means the beginning of a

brilliant series of conquests. Indeed, I think socially we were rather failures. Not that we were plain-looking. I would never allow that, either for my sister Anne or myself. We had our youthful bloom, clearness of colour, brightness of eye, firmness of health, elasticity of step, sunshine of peace and content upon our faces, stamp of good breeding in our air and bearing, and with these advantages no girls can ever be really plain. But we were not of the sort that succeed in society, and I believe the reason of this was that we were too happy at home to care much for what society could do for us. As I said before, we had grown up so at unity amongst ourselves, so content in what we could do for and be to one another, so at peace in the ivy-leaves and India muslin of our own simple lives that we never troubled ourselves about other conditions, never even

questioned what existence could be under them.

Until two Easter-tides after that ball, when I was about one-and-twenty—but I am forgetting. That ball *did* produce one result which perhaps ought to be called important.

As we were being muffled up, ready for our departure, a gentleman, who had danced twice with my sister Anne, asked my mother's permission to call upon us. This was granted. He came again and yet again, and after a few preliminary attentions he intimated to my father that it was his desire to win her for his wife.

Anne was asked for her wishes upon the matter. She quietly said she had none, except to be let alone, and there the matter ended. I think it made as little difference to us as we did to the ball at Burstborough. And I do not think it made much more to

the gentleman himself, for we used to meet him out and about as usual, and no sorrow, such as one reads of in books, seemed to be eating into the heart of him. In fact he married, a few months afterwards, a rather uneducated girl of Burstborough, who was possessed of a conveniently large property.

This led me to think that perhaps Anne's income might have had something to do with the declaration of his attachment. For I have forgotten to mention before that my sister had five thousand pounds of her own in the funds, left to her by her godmother, who died whilst as yet Anne was the only living child. Now that did seem rather hard upon me, whose godmothers have never done anything for me beyond the customary prayer-books and silver spoons; but it never made the least difference to Anne. Of course, the

property did not come into her hands until she was of age, and she was not much over twenty at the time of that ball. And she did not look upon it, when it did happen to be spoken about, as a thing which could at all make her future more prosperous than mine. I think she took for granted that we should always live together, and that what one had would be enjoyed by the whole family.

But I will go on now to what I was going to say when I remembered about my sister Anne's first offer of marriage.

CHAPTER III.

NOT more than a stone's-throw from the church, just across a lovely bit of plantation, was the cottage, covered in summer-time with blossoming creepers, where my Aunt Sunshine lived.

In ordinary society she was known as Miss Newcourt, formerly of Newcourt House. To the village people, who had known her from her childhood, first in her father's home, and then in this cottage, to which she removed after my grandparents' death, she was Miss Christabel; but for us four at the rectory she was Aunt Sun-

shine, never anything else than Aunt Sunshine.

How she first slipped into the light of such a name I do not know. Perhaps it grew up with her from her babyhood, coming naturally by contrast with the elder sister's calmer, more thoughtful temperament, for my mother was characterized by great dignity. People even sometimes thought her cold, that was their own fault; but reserved she certainly was, except to those whom she loved most deeply. Now Aunt Sunshine, on the contrary, ran over with readily-expressed good-will and sympathy. She produced at once the impression which could only be possible after years of acquaintance with my mother. Both were alike genuine and sincere, true to the very core; but you saw clearly into the heart of one, while the other revealed herself

only to the few who could wait and be patient.

Aunt Sunshine was by no means such a cultivated woman as my mother. More than five-and-twenty years lived by herself in that secluded cottage, with perhaps a visit once a year or so, when rheumatism asked for it, to Bath or Buxton, had rather made her lose touch with the more advanced portion of her own generation. She used laughingly to say that herself and my mother were capital illustrations of the effects produced by the presence or absence of superior masculine companionship, for my mother was up in all the leading questions of the day, and would floor a dozen Lady Matildas, if it came to questions of art or literature; whilst Aunt Sunshine, except in the most exquisite appreciation of old lace and china, of which she had a perfect museum,

was what would be called decidedly behind the times.

Nor was it to her that we ever went for the fashions. Do I not remember how she wore her shawl—it was always a shawl with Aunt Sunshine—in a point at the back, years and years after everyone else had adopted the square style, and the more daring spirits in Willoughby were even beginning to drape a corner over the left shoulder after the manner, with a difference, of the Apollo Belvidere? And then the four neat little folds pinned down at the neck of that said shawl behind, to make the whole thing sit prettily; for auntie had not yet given over being a trifle proud of her trim figure and her falling shoulders: just the shoulders for a shawl, as people used to tell her, she said, when she was a girl. And that was why she kept to it so faithfully, I suppose, in

its primitive style, when the fashionable world was rushing madly after jackets and dolmans, and paletots of all sorts and sizes. And there was one shawl, such an old-fashioned one, with an Indian pattern down one side of it, and every summer, for just a single week, auntie used to take that shawl out and wear it, and then it was put away again. Why or wherefore we never asked, and auntie never told us. Could it ever have been very much admired, faded and out of date as it looked to us young people? Had something, which could never be forgotten, happened in connection with it? We did not know. Only when the end came, and she lay in her coffin, the old shawl was for the last time taken out and wrapped round her, so. Dear Aunt Sunshine !

And her afternoon silk dress, generally cut a little square in front, for had she not

still the prettiest neck and throat, white and smooth and kissable, under the soft net always folded so modestly round, and whiter still for the bit of black velvet to which a tiny gold locket was attached? That locket, too, must have had its history. Day and night, summer and winter, she wore it, and afterwards, too, in the long sleep which knows no earthly waking. But as I say, we never asked about these things; for, with all her open-hearted brightness, Aunt Sunshine had a way which told us we must go so far and no farther.

She was possessed of an income which enabled her to keep two little maids and a boy, and a neat carriage and pony. Almost any fine afternoon you might see Aunt Sunshine driving herself in that pony-carriage at the most leisurely pace, for Jessie, the pony, was not to be hurried, any more than the solar system; and at her

side you might generally see some invalid, a little child or aged person, to whom the warmth and fresh air, taken without fatigue, was likely to be a blessing. And if the weather was not fine, if there was east wind or driving fog or biting frost, you might still see Aunt Sunshine in the pony-carriage, but instead of the invalid by her side, there would be a big basket whose contents were on their way to bless some poor cottage in the parish. The treasures which came out of that big basket! The bright face and the beaming smile with which they were dispensed; the shrewdness and prudence which always guided them to the right person. For people never got over Aunt Sunshine; I believe, having clearness of heart, she had clearness of vision too, and could separate the good from the bad, even whilst they were growing together for the harvest. What a

treasure she would have been in a town parish.

Also, she was never alone. Well, such as she never are, but I mean in the ordinary social sense. She had two guest-rooms in that cottage of hers. One of them was for her friends who came to her when they wanted brightening and cherishing. The other was occupied, except in winter time, by any well-recommended poor person from out of the lanes and dens of Burstborough, some ailing mother, or invalid child, or servant girl who had been half starved both of food and fresh air. When one was nursed back to life and strength, she returned to her work and another came. That was Aunt Sunshine's way of doing good. I have seldom met with a better.

CHAPTER IV.

It was in March of the second year after that ball at which my sister Anne and I came out with so moderate an effect upon the public generally, and I had set out one Sunday afternoon to have a quiet hour in church before service began. Easter-tide was coming, and the decorations had to be thought about. Aunt Sunshine and my sister used always to do the chancel. I took the font as my share, and any kind friends who were willing to help us, looked after the pulpit, lectern, and windows.

We were very proud of our font, not

from a decorative point of view merely, but on account of its architectural merits. It was a genuine bit of Early-English work, pure and simple, untouched as yet by the hand of the restorer, with its leafy margin and slender clustered columns, worn indeed by long centuries of use, but bearing still the impress of the love and skill of the old monkish craftsmen, who worked so patiently, praying as they worked, in the days when work and prayer were one. Beautiful, however, as was its broidery of stone and cunning tracery of leaf and boss, the special glory of Willoughby church font lay in its wrought-iron canopy of Italian work, four centuries old, which people, who were curious in such matters, came from far and near to see. It was suspended by chains from the roof, and gave one, as Aunt Sunshine said, the impression of a very large extinguisher. Indeed, auntie

told me she never could be comfortable at a baptism in Willoughby Clays church; she always felt afraid the chains might give way just as my father was holding the baby over the font, and then what would have become of the poor little thing? However, such a thing had never happened. I think those chains, fine and delicate and slender as they looked, were as strong as the faith of the old craftsmen who wrought them.

A new idea had struck me for the decoration of this font. The cover had always been my great difficulty, for, labour as I would, I could not get the flowers to look effective upon it. Now, instead of flowers, I would outline the tracery of the ironwork with those fine ivy stems which we found on the moor hills. This, with little knots of primroses at some of the intersections, would produce, I

thought, a very artistic effect, and would also be original. So I set off that Sunday afternoon with my head very full of plans and ideas, so full that I really forgot where I was going, and, instead of taking the proper turn from our orchard into the churchyard, I found myself in the bit of road which led to Aunt Sunshine's cottage.

It was no great consequence. I would not turn back. Aunt Sunshine had not been at church that morning, and I would go on, to inquire the cause of her absence. True, I had not been there myself, but then, I often did stay at home after morning Sunday school, whereas auntie was as regular as clockwork, unless something very unforeseen happened.

This morning it had been something very unforeseen, as I found out as soon as I crossed the threshold of the cosy little dining-room ; for auntie's best dessert-

service of Crown Derby, only produced on the stateliest occasions, was in full force upon the table, and a dishful of auntie's Ribston apples—now, in the middle of March, firm and rosy and sound as when they left her orchard, and therefore as uncommon in their way as the Crown Derby—occupied the place of honour in the centre; and auntie herself, in her mulberry silk, with that lovely old Mechlin at the throat, seemed as if she too had felt it necessary to make a little more appearance than usual, and the cause of all this manifestation, a gentleman whom I had never seen before, was sitting in the arm-chair, apparently quite at home there.

‘Marjorie,’ said my aunt, ‘this is Mr. Forrester, the nephew of Mrs. Forrester, who was so good to me at Buxton when I went there for my rheumatism three or four

years ago, you know. My niece, Miss Marjorie Haseltine, Mr. Forrester.'

I bowed politely to the nephew of the lady who had been so good to my aunt. He was a pleasant-looking man of about thirty, with what appeared to me, unaccustomed as I was to town people, quite a noticeable air about him. Not of the fashionable sort, like the Burstborough ball gentlemen, but thoughtful, practical, shrewd. Aunt Sunshine went on with her explanations.

'He has been overworking at that grammar school up in the north, and the doctor ordered him off for a week; and, as he had to pass Stilbury, he came over to see me, and I have made him stay Sunday over. I am sure the air here is better than in Norfolk, where he is going.'

As far as I could make out at a first

glance, there was nothing invalidish about him. But then, as a rule, men do not carry their ill-health on their faces as women do. You may notice that fact in hydropathic establishments and the like, where the men look quite comfortable, while the women move about like shadows. Or is it that a woman struggles on and holds up and sticks to her colours like a Trojan until the citadel is well-nigh starved out, before she will run up a flag of truce? Whereas a man, with that discretion which is so much the better part of valour, surrenders in good time whilst yet there is hope that plentiful coddling and unlimited self-denial on the part of those who have to minister to him, will restore the condition in which life is a pleasure, not a pain. I am not quite sure. However, I was bound to express some kind of sympathy, and I said,

‘I am very sorry you have been ill. I hope the air of Willoughby will do you good. It is said to be quite bracing when you get on the moors.’

‘Miss Newcourt has put the case too strongly,’ he replied, settling down again after our introduction was over, to the paring of his Ribston. ‘I have not been ill at all, and I have not been working hard. I have only had a succession of troublesome gum-boils, and the head-master kindly let me off for a week, to get rid of them in peace.’

That was not so romantic as an overwrought brain ; but I liked him better for explaining. I had rather a man spoke out, if it is only about a gum-boil. I told him my aunt always did try to make people appear more interesting than they really were ; and then, feeling that I had said something very awkward and ungracious,

I tried to cover it up by offering to pare an apple for Aunt Sunshine.

‘No, thank you, my dear. I never care for Ribstons after Christmas; let those eat them that like them. I find Mr. Forrester knows Dalton-by-the-Sea. He has heard of your Aunt Drusilla there.’

Aunt Drusilla was my father’s sister. One of us used to go and stay with her for a month every summer, and we did not care for it very much, for the sort of life she lived was a dull one. But, when my sister Anne came back from her last visit, she mentioned having been very much interested in a course of lectures upon Spenser’s ‘Fairy Queen,’ which had been given there by a Mr. Forrester. She showed me the newspaper reports of them, and I was interested too. How much strange and beautiful meaning he had read into the old poem! What an allegory of

human life and character it became under his sympathetic interpretation. How he tracked the golden thread of similitude through all its windings until one reached the very central heart of the truth. And here he was—at least it was most likely the same—and I had as good as told him that Aunt Sunshine had made him out to be more interesting than he really was. That was, of course, quite enough to make me feel ill at ease, even if my general consciousness of shortcoming had not done so before.

He seemed to know something about us, too, for he asked me if I was very much interested in parish work. He was evidently mistaking me for my sister Anne, whose praise was in all the churches. I told him I had no talents in that direction, and that I occupied myself chiefly in domestic matters.

‘Indeed,’ I said, ‘I think we spend a great deal of useless labour over the poor. People always seem to me to go to one of two extremes. They either think that the poor are made entirely for their convenience, or that they are made entirely for the convenience of the poor.’

Mr. Forrester looked at me with an amused expression. I felt ashamed of myself. I did not often venture upon such a long speech even in the safe shelter of my own family, still less amongst strangers. And I had the uncomfortable consciousness, too, that if he asked me to explain myself I could not do so. I knew well enough what I meant, but the difficulty was in putting it properly. To change the subject I asked Aunt Sunshine why she had not been to church in the morning.

‘Mr. Forrester was the reason, my dear. He came upon me quite unexpectedly in

the afternoon of Saturday, and we have had so many things to talk about, and Betsey has a whitlow on her thumb, and so I did not like her to do anything with the cooking. I can't bear a whitlow in connection with pastry. Was Lady Matilda at church? I heard they came back from their wedding-tour some days ago.'

'Yes, she was there but I was not, so I can only tell you what my mother and Anne said.'

'Well, then, what *did* they say? What is she like?'

'Oh, nothing special ; plain and proper. A very handsome grey silk and a sealskin jacket, and a velvet bonnet to match the dress. Nothing bridal-looking.'

'Of course not. At her age it would be ridiculous. I am glad she has sense enough to be aware of that. Well, I hope she will be interested in the parish, but not too

much so. I have been told that she is a very good churchwoman, and I must say it made me have my doubts.'

'Oh, auntie! why?'

'Because a good churchwoman doesn't always mean a good Christian. It may mean that she wants to have a finger in everything, and will have us all set to rights, from the rector in the pulpit down to the very moles in the church-yard.'

'If she would begin with the moles,' said Mr. Forrester, gravely, 'it would be an advantage. I have heard they are very troublesome when you want a place nicely kept, and I should think the rector, in this case, would not suffer from being let alone. Mr. Rakeridge has married amongst the nobility then?'

'Yes,' said my aunt, 'very much so. Our new bride is the daughter of the Earl

of Blankfort. Mr. and Lady Matilda Rakeridge. It does sound uncomfortable. Now Mr. and Mrs., and earl and countess, make a comfortable combination, but in this case the poor man seems to have to stand such a long time out in the cold for his wife's title to be got through before his own name has its turn. Still, they may be happy, all the same. Marjorie, are you going to church this afternoon ?'

'Yes, I meant to have gone straight from home there, but I came here instead. I have a new idea about decorating the font, and I must consider it. Are you going ?'

'Yes, specially as I was not there this morning. I should not feel comfortable to miss both services. Mr. Forrester, shall you go ?'

'No, thank you,' he said, promptly.
'But I think I might as well walk with

you, and then I can go round by the moor hills, as you say it is a pretty walk.'

The moor hills!—he was not much of an invalid if he could do that, and I told him so.

'It is a good seven miles' walk, Mr. Forrester, and I thought you came here to be nursed up.'

Again he looked at me with that amused expression which made me feel I was saying the wrong thing in the wrong place.

'I am very sorry, Miss Haseltine, that you should think I am obtaining goods under false pretences. I told you honestly, at the very outset, that I had only had a few gum-boils, more or less. And a gum-boil, as you know——'

He was laughing at me again, then. But auntie never saw a joke. She always took things literally, and she was afraid he might misunderstand me.

‘No, Mr. Forrester, I am sure she *doesn't* know, for she never had one. The Haseltines all have splendid teeth, but you may ask me, if you like, and I can quite sympathise with what you must have gone through. I can testify they are the most painful things. Marjorie dear, you are so abrupt. What will Mr. Forrester think?’

At this we both broke into a laugh, and I went off with auntie to help her to put her bonnet on.

CHAPTER V.

It was about the middle of March, perhaps rather towards the end, and the spring that year had opened early. I can remember even to-day how, as we came out of my aunt's garden-gate, the birch-trees had begun to be knotted with tiny buds, and the lilacs had pushed forth tender leaves which shone, pale russet and golden green, in the afternoon light. Farther off, one could see, over the park elms, that fleeting purple colour which comes just before the first green bursts out. Here and there, a larch-tree, stronger

than the rest, had put on its spring veil ; the thorn-bushes were clustered thick with the village children's 'bread-and-cheese.' The thrushes sang merrily in the topmost boughs of the sycamores ; down below the primroses bloomed, side by side with the wood anemones. Amongst them you could see the pale young spikes of the wild hyacinth, with their folded buds, which by-and-by would make a heaven upon earth, so wondrous blue their beauty all up and down the leaf-strewn paths of the wood. Just across the road, past the orchard, the grey tower of my father's church showed above the yew-trees ; hard by it the gables of the rectory, my own little window in one of them, my little window which by Easter time would be so gay with long, drooping westeria blossoms.

By Easter time. But I did not know

yet how pleasant that Easter time would be.

‘We can go straight across by the road,’ said Aunt Sunshine, ‘or we can make it a little longer by the wood. Which way shall we take?’

‘Let us take the long way,’ said Mr. Forrester; and so we did.

‘There is plenty of time,’ said my aunt, who always liked to show her guests that wood, and the lovely peep of the moor hills which came at the end of it. ‘It wants a quarter to three yet by my watch, Marjorie.’

‘And twenty minutes by mine, auntie. Yours is nearly always fast.’

‘So is yours this afternoon,’ said our stranger, ‘at least by mine, which was set yesterday to Greenwich. It is barely half-past two. So we need not hurry.’

And we did not. I enjoyed seeing Mr.

Forrester's enjoyment of that woodland path. I had walked it so many times with city-bred people, who seemed to think they were rather doing Nature a favour by allowing that a real clump of primroses at the foot of a mossy stump was half so lovely as the same thing done in oils by the artist of the season, and hung in a suitably magnificent frame upon the walls of the Royal Academy ; people who openly pitied me for having real hills to look at instead of water-colour ones, and who could not understand how I managed to struggle through May and June with only the blackbird's song, never that of Mapleson and Gye's latest prima donna. Now I could tell from the first that Mr. Forrester had the quiet, sympathetic love of one who, though exiled from Nature in his daily life, still found his true home in her presence. He did not go into raptures over

anything. He did not rack the dictionary for expressions of delight. He just simply and heartily enjoyed his walk, finding out for himself, without any formal introduction of mine, all the sweetest lovelinesses of it.

As we went we plucked the primroses, the wood anemones, the long, trailing mosses which grew in the depths of the wood. I forget where our prayer-books were. Certainly they were not in our hands, duly prominent with red edges and crosses, or we should not have been accosted, about half-way to church, by a stranger, a robust female, carrying an umbrella and a black merino bag.

She was walking away sharply and vigorously, quite too sharply and vigorously considering the beauty of the afternoon, in the direction of the brick-fields, where one of the Sunday-school

teachers held a simple little afternoon service for the work people. Seeing us in one of the side paths, she struck across to us from the main plantation road. Possibly she was going to ask the way to the brick-fields, for she looked like a stranger, and she was afraid of being late at whatever service she meant to attend.

Nothing of the sort. The lady wanted none of our advice. She evidently thought we needed some of hers instead. For, with a glance of appalling severity, first at the primroses in Aunt Sunshine's hands, and then at the ivy leaves in mine, and then at the willow catkins with which Mr. Forrester had laden himself, she delivered her message as follows :

'I am astonished to see you breaking the Sabbath in this way, when the house of God is open to all who wish to attend it. No wonder the poor forsake the assem-

bling of themselves together, when well-dressed people set them such an example. Shame upon you.'

And tight-reefing her fur-lined cloak about her, and elevating her chin, and casting a yet more severe glance towards our three pairs of hands, so destitute, alas ! of the accompaniments which might have proclaimed us to be on our way to the assembling of ourselves together, she passed on, stepping well out, as a woman should who knows that she, at least, is on the right track, however far her neighbours may be from it.

We did not so much as attempt to defend ourselves, the onslaught was too sudden and unexpected. We did not look back upon the retreating figure of our Cassandra with bag and umbrella. We did not even venture to smile until we had passed a bend in the road, and were at

least a hundred yards away. Then Mr. Forrester remarked,

‘I see you have the Public Worship Act in force at Willoughby Clays.’

‘Oh, dear, no!’ said Aunt Sunshine, eagerly, anxious to disabuse his mind of the idea that my father, the gentleman who had married her own sister, could ever need such extreme measures brought to bear upon him. ‘My brother-in-law is a most moderate man. I am sure nobody could find fault with his manner of conducting the service. Do you think they could, Marjorie dear?’

‘No, auntie. But Mr. Forrester was only joking about that woman who spoke to us just now.’

‘My dear, what *can* that poor creature have to do with the Public Worship Act?’ and Aunt Sunshine’s tone changed to one of pity and relief. ‘I was so frightened,

but I didn't like to say anything to make you nervous, Marjorie, for I know you have such a dread of insane people. It really is a shame that anyone afflicted in that way should be allowed to go about without an attendant. If you had not been with us, Mr. Forrester, I think I should almost have fainted.'

Mr. Forrester laughed.

'She is as right as any of us, only our prayer-books were in the wrong place. And, after all, why shouldn't we be treated as we ourselves treat poor people when we go uninvited into their houses and rate them for not attending what we call the means of grace? How can we tell but that all the time they may have their prayer-books in their pockets, though they have cares and troubles enough in their hands, poor things! instead of palms and prim-roses.'

Aunt Sunshine looked mystified. Her ideas never expressed themselves in such bold metaphors. I looked straight at him, for I felt something of my own in his thoughts, as well as in his way of putting them.

‘I believe,’ said auntie, gravely, ‘that most of the people in Willoughby do go regularly to church, and they are always supplied with prayer-books, if they don’t happen to have any of their own. My brother-in-law tells Jonathan Dumble always to look out and be ready, if he sees anyone in difficulty about finding the places. And it is so nice for us that there are no dissenters.’

‘At least,’ she added, catching herself up hastily, for as she said afterwards you can never tell with these clever original people, whether they may not have a crook in that direction themselves, ‘at least I

mean they rather hamper a clergyman when he is wishful to do his duty all round properly. But I do not think anything comes up to the Salvation Army.'

Auntie might venture so far, for at any rate he could not belong to that.

'Not for being downright and absolutely in the way. And now I do wonder if that person belongs to it. Of course we never have them here, but they might march out from Burstborough, 'and hold a meeting somewhere, and now I come to think about it, I believe I have heard that they carry black bags, and certainly they do walk in that tremendously military way, so unfeminine it appears to me.'

'Well, we shall have to march too, auntie, if we don't want to be late. There is the five minutes bell just putting in.'

'Marjorie, you don't say so. Mr. Forrester, yonder is the road to the moor

hills, through the gate, and to the right.’

Mr. Forrester dived into one of his pockets, and produced a well-worn little prayer-book.

‘Thank you, Miss Newcourt,’ he said, ‘but I shall go to church, too.’

Could it have been Cassandra that had done it? But in that case he would not have had the prayer-book ready.

CHAPTER VI.

How well I remember my father's sermon that Sunday afternoon. It was about character, and its influence upon the next life. For, as I have said, it was towards that other life that his thoughts at Easter time always seemed to gather.

Towards life, not death. For him, death was only a circumstance in the necessary on-going of a continuously self-conscious existence. He seemed, more than anyone else I have ever met, to realise and be comforted by the unity of this life and the next. They were for him in very truth the same, only lived under different con-

ditions. What a steadfastness this gave to his conduct. How it kept him from being lifted or depressed by anything which did not reach down to the real foundations of character. It was little Davie's death, I have heard my mother say, which did this. What a gift then, that child had bestowed, though his grave was the guerdon of it. How, in passing from the sight of their eyes, he had entered more vividly into my parents' existence than if he had been actually living and moving amongst us. For he had broken down the middle wall of partition between this world and the next, and, for them, had made both one.

I wrote down much of what my father said that Sunday afternoon. I remembered it so well, because then, for the first time, I seemed to be listening for another as well as for myself. This is the substance of his sermon.

‘What may we say of the life beyond? We may say that it is in no sort different from the life on this side, except that we live it without that body which God has appointed as the soul’s abiding-place during the first stage of its existence. By that fleshly encasement, by the limitations which it imposes upon us, by the labour, sorrow, anxiety to which it compels us in the supply of its needs, and in the occasions which it brings for self-denial, culture, restraint, government, a discipline is provided for the soul, which apart from such conditions it could not have. Having passed through these conditions well, having learnt from appetite, restraint; from labour, self-help; from suffering, strength; from weariness, patience; from sorrow, aspiration; it is in due time freed, but into no new, strange life, only into a clearer atmosphere, a state independent of material

limitations, there to go on living with just so much of nobility, purity, content, as it shall have won for itself by a faithful use of the conditions imposed upon it here.'

'The soul that loves God needs no heaven but freedom from sin, because freedom from sin means life to the uttermost, that fulness of life which the simple fact of living in God's presence implies.'

'It is from the physical conditions of this present life that evil, the necessary opposite of good, is produced. The soul, the pure breath and essence of God, must, apart from matter, be sinless. To use external life then, so that, instead of dwarfing and polluting, it shall develop the soul, this is the essential thing.'

'Life after death is a life dependent entirely for its worth or unworthiness upon the life which has been lived before death. All that has ministered to the upward

growth of character here, will be carried on hereafter; whilst of simple necessity those things which have their source and limit in the needs or whims of the body must cease. And when we think for how many people these things compass the whole of their life, we cannot wonder that such prefer to shut out the future from their speculations; or possibly they comfort themselves by assuming that some miracle shall be wrought, through which the feeble atom of spirituality into which they have, by their own choice, dwindled their souls, shall be enabled to appreciate a vague psalm-singing immortality. The truth is, such people have nothing with which to begin the future. Life, apart from the body, means nothing to them. They have nothing which can lay hold upon it. Truly what we are making ourselves now, such we shall be then. It

rests with each of us to determine what store we will have to begin that spiritual life, with which bodily necessities shall no longer interfere. Just so far as we have lived with that part of ourselves which is akin to God, shall we feel ourselves at home with Him when the life of physical sense has passed away. That which has had its influence upon character will then be proved to have been the only important thing.'

'To be beautiful in our own life is what we need. And it is the doing of duty which makes the soul fair, no matter what that duty may be. So that the meek, neglected, unknown ones of earth, who have toiled on in the loving, patient doing of such work as God gave them to do, have by that very toil wrought the soul into a beauty beyond all intellect, beyond all art-culture, beyond everything which

the learning or science of mankind, impossible to them, could have developed. Such lives, when this bodily vesture shall have fallen away, will be sovereign in the spiritual world. The discipline so silently gone through here has freed them into that clearness of vision hereafter to which the most perfect sight of the Divine shall be granted.'

'So then that which has its influence on character is alone the important thing. To wear such fine clothes that our neighbours stare at us and envy us, this is damaging both to ourselves and them. To be free from the need of toil and self-denial, this produces decay of the soul. To eat the fat and drink the sweet—this only—is to bring ourselves to the level of the swine. To know all mysteries and all knowledge which have their limit in a material existence, this is to dwarf the soul and turn it

out at last, blind, halt, maimed, into a life which you have given it no power to enjoy. Love, purity, self-denial, simplicity, sincerity, these are the virtues through which the soul grows to its height, and these depend upon no earthly estate. The poor in purse, intellect, culture, are free to them alike with the rich ; nay, freer than the rich.'

'Our own characters are in our own hands. Physical and mental faults we may have inherited, and during this present material life we must, patiently as we can, bear the burden. Natural laws make no allowances for them. We are born blind, then we go dark through life. We are born deaf, then music has no meaning for us. We are ignorant, rash, impatient. Physical laws deal with our mistakes as if they were sins. But it is given to everyone to learn the wisdom which comes of

experience, the patience which grows from suffering. Here the education of the soul, which is trusted to everyone, begins; and so we make our life hereafter. That they might have life; that is Christ's. That they might have it more abundantly; that is ours.'

I wish I could remember all my father said that Sunday, of the influence such a faith as this should have upon our daily lives, how independent it should make us of those things which perish in the using, how resolutely we should keep them in their place and give much thought only to those which minister to the growth of character. But truly his own life was a living sermon upon this subject, and by that, more than by his written or spoken words, we were influenced.

Mr. Forrester listened very earnestly. It was curious to see what a change

came over his manner, shortly after the beginning of the sermon. When the hymn which preceded it was over, he settled down into the corner of the pew, as if he meant to be quite absorbed, but in his own thoughts. Gradually he roused up, first to attention, then to interest. His face took on an expression of keen, critical satisfaction. I could tell that he was at one with the thoughts and aims and aspirations of my father, though their characters, so far as I had yet had opportunity to judge, were entirely different.

When the service was over and the people had dispersed, we went down to the font for me to discuss my new plan of decoration with Aunt Sunshine. Mr. Forrester asked if he might be introduced to my father. That was done, and then we all went across to the rectory for tea. The conversation turned chiefly upon the ser-

mon. I think my father soon found that our new acquaintance was a man worth cultivating, for I have seldom heard him talk so freely to a stranger of his own thoughts and opinions. When he did find anyone who could sympathise with these, he very quickly cast away his natural reserve, but the finding was rare indeed.

‘I felt I should like to believe all you told us this afternoon,’ said Mr. Forrester, as we took our tea round the drawing-room fire, my mother and Aunt Sunshine meanwhile discussing some domestic matters on their own account, ‘but your theory seems to dismiss these poor bodies of ours so entirely after this present life, that I think you shut us out from many sources of enjoyment which I should like if I could to carry forward into the future.’

‘What is there, then, worth enjoying at all which you cannot enjoy without such

a body as carries us about now?' said my father.

'Well, to begin with, all the beauty of Nature. I do not like to think that I shall lose in another life all that dawn and twilight, sunrise and sunset, spring and summer mean to me here.'

'And why should you? For the cultured mind there is no limit to the enjoyment which may be taken in by the senses of sight and hearing; but why should these enjoyments cease because the physical organs which conveyed them to us have perished? The magnificence of Nature remains, and it is only our ignorance which takes for granted that it cannot be made manifest, except through the medium which has hitherto conveyed it to us. A free spirit may be, and probably is, as conscious of the beauty of form, colour, sound, as a fettered one. And just in proportion to

the degree in which, whilst passing through its probation of materiality, it brought out all that was in it of power to appreciate natural beauty, will that power be to it, apart from materiality, an increasing joy for ever.'

'Then you believe that all we can do for ourselves in cultured taste, as well as in the growth of character, is eternal?'

'In the best sense, yes. Throughout our whole spiritual existence we shall be in contact with Nature, the living robe of God. And everything that intensifies our appreciation of it here is laying up treasure for us hereafter. This is also true of all noble human handiwork, all forth-putting of unselfish human intellect, of all result of honest labour into which the workman has put the joy of his soul. And therefore it is that I attach so much importance to surrounding children with beautiful things,

both in Nature and art ; that, whilst they are still living through their senses, they may be preparing for a time when, by much richer avenues than their senses, they may be able to receive impressions of beauty.'

'Your theory,' Mr. Forrester said, 'makes life a thing much better worth living for the thoughtful and the cultured, and also for those who labour honestly at anything. But you don't leave much of a prospect for the well-fed and fashionable fools, who, after all, make up a large proportion of our modern English life.'

'Let them purge their vision with euphrasy and rue, then, and see what it is they are coming to. I am more sick at heart when I think of the rich than of the poor ; so much thought for their bodies, none at all for that which is to go on living when the bodies are done with. So much

spent to fill the pockets of fishmongers, wine merchants, butchers, and provision dealers; so little to help the soul to grow into anything like beauty. I have come to the conclusion that in all things we should think chiefly of how this life may be made to serve the noblest aims of the life which we hope one day to live.'

'And so let the beef and the mutton take care of themselves,' said Mr. Forrester; 'live in the top story, and shut up the pantry.'

'By no means. I would keep the pantry open, but not fill it quite so full, and not spend quite so much time in it. Have your food varied, delicate, if you like, wholesomely cooked, gracefully served, for so you help temper and digestion, and without good digestion neither brain nor spirit can be at its best. This is the end of food, to keep the body in order. Be-

yond that, you have no right to take thought for it. The end of dress is to supply a covering, first convenient and comfortable, then as permanently rich, graceful, beautiful as the wearer can make it. So of furniture, and the surroundings of our homes. Let them serve the purposes of daily comfort first, then let them be as beautiful as they can be made, but lasting in that beauty. I would despise a man, let him own as many thousands as he might, who could spend a hundred pounds one year over chairs, and then the next year, not because the chairs were ugly or worn, but only because the shape had become unfashionable, send them all to the nearest second-hand shop, and spend another hundred in new ones. And then about dress——’

‘Oh, my dear David,’ said Aunt Sunshine, ‘don’t get upon that subject, be-

cause really in your own family you have nothing to complain of. I can tell you, though, that in Bath and Buxton, where I go for my rheumatism, many women didn't attend church, or go to flower-shows and that sort of thing last year, because of the want of a puff at the back of their mantles, which puff would have marked them as being new that season. The mantles were just as pretty, and to my taste a great deal prettier without the puff, but to have them so showed that they were a year old, and to wear a mantle a year old is a depth of humiliation into which not one woman in a thousand can descend. I can tell you something else, too, that I learned at Buxton. You must sink fathoms deep into neglect and obscurity if you have not at least four buttons on your gloves. I mean a woman. Of course a man is judged differently, because of his

coat-sleeves reaching farther down. I believe a man's character depends now upon whether he has side-springs or front-laces to his boots. I can't be quite sure which ; perhaps you know, Mr. Forrester.'

'He is saved by side-springs *this* year,' replied Mr. Forrester, with a gravity befitting the subject. 'I am not in a state of salvation,' he added, seeing that naturally enough we all began to look at his boots. 'Last year one's condition depended upon laces up the front, and I was all right. But do go on, Miss Newcourt. I was never so interested in buttons before. How many indicate a passable superiority of character.'

'Four. As many more as you like, but no fewer, and, to show that I am not joking, you may go into any shop in Buxton and buy one-button gloves at sixpence a pair, which would have been half-a-

crown two years ago; but ladies will not buy them now for public occasions, just as they will not go out in a mantle that has no accredited puff behind. I often think how the Paris shopkeepers, who arrange the fashions to suit their own pockets, must laugh at the simpletons who go rushing after the buttons and the puffs, and the side-springs, too, Mr. Forrester, begging your pardon. But, David, if we keep on talking like this, I shall never get back to start my little maid off to evening church. It must be almost time for the bell now.'

Mr. Forrester took the hint and rose. I thought my father might have asked him to come over and see us again, but he did not.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. FORRESTER, however, took that into his own hands. Next morning, directly after breakfast, as I was standing in front of the hall cupboard, marking and putting away the eggs which Mrs. Dumble had brought in from the poultry-yard, Aunt Sunshine and her guest made their appearance. She dropped him in the porch, where my mother was trimming the yellow jessamine, and came forward to explain matters to me.

‘I know we are dreadfully early, Marjorie, my dear, but a man does get so dull

by himself in a little house. He seemed quite delighted when I said we would come up and see your father again, and perhaps have a walk with him.'

'Only my father is out,' I replied. 'He always takes a round in the parish on Monday mornings.'

'That does not signify a bit. I have got him out and afloat. You and Anne must take him somewhere for a walk, you must indeed, until I have got my blanket-club attended to. There's that pretty walk to the moor hills, where he said he was going yesterday.'

'Don't you think he would rather go by himself?' I suggested, innocently enough, knowing what I should prefer under the circumstances. 'Sometimes a man hates having to keep on talking for so long.'

'I should have thought he would too, Marjorie, but he did not seem at all to

relish it when I proposed he should go over there alone, though this is one day in a thousand for the prospect. But the fact is, my dear, you never can tell beforehand what a man chooses and what a man doesn't choose. On Saturday he was all for solitary walks and meditations, and wouldn't hear of my giving him a drive in the pony-carriage. Now he won't take a walk by himself at all, and he won't stay in the house either. I wonder how people manage who have a man to deal with in a general way ; I mean a man with nothing to do. I never experienced it before. You and Anne will take him out now, will you not ?'

Poor auntie ! She was rather in the fix we found ourselves in once, when Major Consett sent his great mastiff to stay for a fortnight with us. The unbounded capacity of that creature for being walked out

with, and looked after, and petted and amused ! And he was so grateful, too, for being talked to, or even having a bone given him to play with. But auntie was in the condition of old Mother Hubbard, her cupboard was bare, and so the poor dog got none.

‘All right, auntie,’ I replied, for the eggs were done now, and, departing, I soon brought back word that Anne would be very glad of a walk to the moor hills, for little Bennie Bolton, who lived just at the foot of them and had whooping-cough, wanted some more medicine taking, and this would be a fine opportunity of getting it to him. Aunt Sunshine’s face cleared up.

‘Mr. Forrester,’ she said, ‘you will get your walk now. Mr. Haseltine is out, but Anne and Marjorie want to go to the moor hills to see a Sunday scholar who is

ill, and you can go with them. You will find some of that primula there, too, that you were asking me about yesterday. It grows close to the ivy that Marjorie uses for the font. It is a rare kind, Marjorie, that Mr. Forrester wants to get for one of the boys at the school, and I know I have found it there. Now, Phyllis,'—this was to my mother—'I must be off. I never like to keep those blanket-women waiting. You will be back at half-past one for dinner, Mr. Forrester.'

And away trotted Aunt Sunshine, as brisk as a bee now that she had got her mastiff safely disposed of.

Anne came and we started. We were neither of us what would be called good company for a clever man. We had a great want of readiness, an almost total incapacity to make much out of little subjects. The dull, aching feeling of incom-

petence which I have endured at dinner-parties from this very cause ; the gaps and chasms of silence which invariably yawned more and more widely between me and my unfortunate companion as course after course stretched its weary length along. How I blessed the arrival of dessert and the new ideas which might come with the d'oylies. What a resource did I find those that were done in marking-ink upon fine linen, little heads and faces and groups, after the Kate Greenaway style. One could generally find something to say after the d'oylies came. Now here was not a dinner-party of say an hour and a half, but a walk of over six miles, and no little heads and faces and figures to be talked about. How should we get through it?

We got through it very well. I think we were all of us sorry when it came to an

end. We started with the *Faery Queen*, which both Anne and I had read after those lectures at Dalton, and that lasted us—for Mr. Forrester could repeat it almost by heart—until we reached Mrs. Bolton's cottage, where Anne left us to go and inquire after her little scholar. Mr. Forrester and I were to go to the top of the hill to see the view over the Avon valley, and find the primula, then meet Anne, and so home by the brick-fields.

‘I am glad we are having a little time to ourselves,’ he began, as we climbed the winding path amongst the gorse. ‘I want to ask you about what you were saying yesterday, when you came in to see Miss Newcourt. I mean about the rich and the poor. Just say it again, will you?’

That was more than I could do, and I told him so.

‘Well, then,’ he said, ‘I think I can repeat it word for word, because it struck me as being well worth thinking about. Only you must explain what you meant. You said that people as a rule seemed to think that either they were made entirely for the service of the poor, or the poor were made entirely for their service.’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘so far as I have been able to make out amongst well-to-do people, there are only two classes, those who get all they can out of the poor, in the shape of hard work and low wages, and those who try to plaster over this injustice by pauperising them with alms and personal service. I don’t think either of these ways will ever really help the poor; but I haven’t had experience enough to know much about it.’

‘If you haven’t had much experience,’ he said, ‘you seem to have common sense

enough to make a good use of what little has come in your way. How, then, would you help the poor ?’

‘By teaching them to help themselves,’ I replied, ‘by showing them that thrift and self-control and self-denial are of at least as much importance to them as to people in a higher position, that if they can’t put two eggs in their pudding, they must be content with one, and if they can’t afford that one, they must cast about for a pudding which doesn’t want any eggs at all. There are such to be found in the cookery-books.’

‘And out of them, too,’ said Mr. Forrester, with an edge of bitterness in his tone, ‘I don’t suppose many women, or men either, get far on in their soul’s house-keeping, without finding that two eggs are more than they can afford ; and before long the pudding has to get itself made

without one at all. In fact, you must use baking-powder, have recourse to chemical expedients, fall back upon philosophy to make your pudding, or your circumstances, as the case may be, a success.'

'Aunt Sunshine despises baking-powder,' I replied, gravely. 'She says a really good housekeeper need never be at a loss for an egg. And I believe she is right.'

'Likely enough she is, so far as you are concerned. I don't suppose in that pretty home of yours, down among the elm-trees, you ever have to cast about for ways and means to make yourself comfortable enough. For you, no doubt, the egg market is plentifully supplied.'

'So much the worse, then,' I said, 'seeing that I have to make my pocket-money by stocking it. You know, Mrs. Dumble and I between us attend to the poultry-yard, and I was just sending off my

basket to Burstborough when you and Aunt Sunshine came in this morning. But, seriously, even in that pretty home among the elm-trees, as you call it, we have learned, when we cannot have what we like, to like what we have.'

'I don't think you would like it, Miss Marjorie, if you felt it was keeping you from the *best* thing, from the thing that would really set your life upon its right foundation, and make it, in the true sense of the word, worth living. That is the sort of content I have to like, if I am to like what I have. But we are wandering away from the condition of the poor.'

'Not at all. I should say you are one of the poorest sort yourself, for according to your own showing, you have no eggs to put into your pudding, and you have not so much as found out that there are puddings which will do very well without

them, and without baking-powder either. Aunt Sunshine would tell you, and she knows more about it than all of us put together, that we want neither eggs nor baking-powder, luxury nor philosophy, to make life a worthy and lovely thing. She just lives for other people. She does her duty and she is content. I don't think she ever has to look very far for happiness. And that reminds me we are not looking at all for the primula.'

'Oh! never mind the primula. I have found something much better worth coming out for. Little Malton shall have it, though, for I promised him I would do my best. I shall walk over the hill again this afternoon, and take the train from Burstborough, instead of Stilbury. I shall have plenty of time to look for it then. I wish better things were to be found as easily. Let us go on about this pudding

of circumstances, and the best means of getting it to rise properly in the baking.'

But such a triumph of cookery was not in store for us, for my sister Anne had come out of Mrs. Bolton's cottage and was looking out for a convenient spot to cross the little brook which pattered along at the foot of the hill. Mr. Forrester hurried down to help her, and then we all turned home together, my sister telling us in her calm matter-of-fact way about little Bennie and his whooping-cough, and how Mrs. Bolton had been put to her wits' end to find a turnip to scrape down and boil with sugar for him, Mrs. Dumble having told her it would cure the cough in no time. And if she would not get one, well, then Bennie must cough to May day; because, whatever time you happened upon whooping-cough, cast it before next May day you could not, except by means of a turnip

boiled down with sugar. And to get turnips in the middle of March——

‘But I told her I would write up to Covent Garden, sooner than she should not have one,’ said Anne, ‘for the poor little lad did have such a fit of the cough whilst I was there, and Mrs. Bolton says she gets no rest day nor night. No doubt the other five will have it too, and I am afraid all the turnips in Covent Garden will not get the coast properly cleared before May day. The poor woman looks worn to a shadow, but of course she must go on as usual, keeping things clean and decent.’

As she was doing that morning; for, even whilst we were talking about her, she came out of her cottage with an armful of carpets and mats, which she began to shake on the little bit of grass in the front. With half-a-dozen well-directed leaps, Mr.

Forrester was on the scene of action. Then taking the things he shook them all for her, keeping well to the right side of the wind, and stowed them back in the cottage, from which, a minute or two afterwards, he came out and was up with us again, just as I had secured a root of primula from its hiding-place under a gorse bush.

‘Not many eggs in *that* basket,’ he said, as he joined us. ‘It is a case of baking-powder or no pudding at all.’

Anne looked puzzled, but asked no questions. She had already discovered in Mr. Forrester a man of what might be called original views, and she always let such people alone. Hers was a mind that saw things as matters-of-fact. If they wanted improving, she did her best to improve them. Where other people speculated, she acted. Indeed, I know that the very next

day she obtained a turnip from Mr. Rake-ridge's gardener, though whether it cured the cough I do not remember.

Mr. Forrester had scarcely shaken the dust out of his coat when my father came in sight, rounding the bend of the hill, and Anne and I fell behind for the rest of the way, leaving the two gentlemen in front. They must have been having an interesting conversation, by the way they stuck to each other until we reached the rectory.

'Will you not come in to lunch?' said my father.

'No, thank you,' Mr. Forrester replied, without a moment's hesitation. 'I must be with Miss Newcourt at half-past one.'

'I am sure my sister-in-law will not mind.'

'But I shall,' said Mr. Forrester, 'and I am leaving this afternoon.'

Then he wished us all good-bye, telling

me he had not had a pleasanter walk for a long time. We watched him until he was out of sight beyond the church yew-trees.

‘I like that young man,’ said my father, as we turned into the house. ‘There is something in him.’

And the words gave me a strange new pleasure.

CHAPTER VIII.

THINGS were never quite the same again after that. One can scarcely tell how it is that such a filmy web of imagination, slight, impalpable as those gossamer threads, only visible when the sun shines upon them, which float in the dewy dawn of a September morning, can yet bind us to a sweet past or a sweeter future. Somehow my thoughts, when I had time to let them wander as they would, always now gathered round those two days which had brought such a new influence into my life, I seemed to live over again little bits of our talk

together. The very primroses at the root of the great elm-tree in the plantation brought back to me, every time I passed them now, the words Mr. Forrester had been saying as Cassandra hove in sight, umbrella and prayer-book in hand, from the leafy distance. And many a visit did Bennie Bolton get from me, many a half hour have I nursed and played with his mother's perennial baby—for that cottage never was without an infant of months—that I might pass the hill road and sit down by the ivy clump where we two stood, talking egg philosophy whilst sister Anne practised good works in the cottage below.

Yet, so far as anyone but myself could tell, the current of life flowed on just as quietly as usual. My father studied, my mother went about her placid household ways. Anne tended the poor in the parish,

I sent my eggs to market on a Monday morning, always now with a little smile of pleasant remembrance. I think that spring the cochin-chinas were bigger and browner than ever. Certainly they brought me a better return for my trouble, and I was able to give something towards sending Bennie to a convalescent home for children. Bennie got more than his share of attention from me for many a day afterwards.

One thing was different. We seemed to have a new interest in the family now. Mr. Forrester's name was often mentioned. My father seemed to have taken very kindly to him, and he soon had an opportunity of showing that kindness in a substantial form.

It was only a day or two after that walk to the moor hills, that the headmaster of the Burstborough grammar-school came to see us. He told my father

there was going to be a change in the staff of masters, and, after enquiry into the qualifications necessary, my father wrote to Mr. Forrester, advising him to offer himself as a candidate for the second mastership.

This he did. The election was to take place after Easter. My father, who was a scholar as well as a gentleman and a Christian, had an influential position as member of the council board, and the recommendation which he could so honestly give would, we all hoped, be of service. I think that both my father and mother felt that such a man, with strength of will to work, and with sympathies reaching far beyond his immediate sphere of duty, would do great good in a place like Burstborough, where there was an abundance of wealth and even a superior abundance of poverty ; but as yet no officiating clergy-

man to marry the two in the bonds of mutual helpfulness.

This question of the second mastership brought Mr. Forrester into frequent correspondence with us. My parents consulted each other on most matters, and we, their children, listened often to the consultations, though we were not always, and certainly not in this case, asked to give our opinions. For me it was enough to hear Mr. Forrester praised. Perhaps, too, I was not without a little secret pleasure in the knowledge that what I felt and thought about things was interesting to him. For I got on as a rule so badly at dinner-parties that I had begun to doubt my fitness for any kind of society; and, all imagination apart, it was a relief to me to find that a man whom my father admired could enjoy an hour's talk with a girl so pitifully lacking in all social quali-

fications as I had long ago discovered myself to be.

Aunt Sunshine was very much interested, though, as she frankly told my father, when he spoke of the desirability of a personal interview with the head-master, nothing should ever induce her to ask Mr. Forrester to the cottage again. A grown-up man, when he took to being unsettled and restless, was such a very uncomfortable thing to have to stay with you.

‘Then we will ask him to come here, shall we, Phyllis?’ said my father.

‘Yes, certainly, David, if you wish it.’

My mother said this after a little pause. She did not speak with any profession of eagerness, still less with the hesitation which might imply that such a visit would be a weariness to her. Indeed, her tone had a reserve of satisfaction in it which thrilled me through with pleasure, just as my

father's had done when we separated after that walk from the moor hills. So it was arranged that Mr. Forrester was to be invited to spend Easter Sunday and Monday with us, and then he and my father were to go over and have an interview with the head-master of the Burstborough grammar-school.

‘But don't think for a moment, Phyllis dear,’ said my aunt, ‘that I have not every possible respect for the young man because I don't want him on my hands again. I am sure for the first day and a half he was as easy to manage as a tame pussycat, and I began to think what a delightful possession he would be for anyone who wanted a permanent lodger. But you never know when a man is going to take on a fit of the fidgets ; and, when once he does take it, you have no idea what it is to be shut up in a small house with him. I

vowed when Mr. Forrester was with me last time I never would go through it again. He was worse than half-a-dozen invalid girls or delicate children rolled into one. But, all the same, you must bring him to dinner when he comes, or to a cup of tea, or anything else that you find convenient, for he is a person I have the greatest possible regard for, only you don't leave him on my hands entirely. And now, Phyllis, when are we to call upon Lady Matilda Rakeridge ?'

'Oh, dear !' said my mother, 'I had quite forgotten. Yes, of course. She made her appearance at church last Sunday, and that means that she ought to be called upon before she makes her appearance there again.'

"'Pity 'tis, 'tis true,'" said my father, getting up to leave us womenfolk to settle our calling business amongst ourselves. He

disliked visits of ceremony as much as any man in the world, and Lady Matilda had the reputation of being somewhat of a female pope as well as a good church-woman.

‘The rector’s family ought to be amongst the first to call,’ continued Aunt Sunshine, ‘and I always feel that I have to represent my poor dear father at Newcourt, as the people who live there now are not gentle-folk. Could we all go together some time?’

I suggested that we should divide our forces, a detachment of us going on the morrow, to save our credit for Sunday, and the remainder making their call the following week.

‘Suppose, Aunt Sunshine, you and Anne go first. You see, being a householder on your own account, you ought to head a party; and then mother and I, and father

too, if he can be persuaded, will pay our respects afterwards.'

'Very well, Anne and I will go, if you like, but not first. The rector and his wife must take the lead. Even if it is a cross, she must carry it. Phyllis, you take Marjorie to-morrow, and Anne and I will do what is proper early next week. What is your impression about Lady Matilda? You know, Marjorie and I have not seen her yet, as we were not at morning church last Sunday.'

'Well, she has a good, strong, sensible face, and she dresses with great plainness, and evidently she is a woman who takes great notice of details. She wiped a little dust from her prayer-book with her pocket handkerchief, and then she drew her finger along the ledge of the pew, to see if any had been left there.'

‘Ah! then David may look out. That tells the whole story. We shall have her bringing a dustpan and brush into the pew before long, if she begins on the first Sunday by using her handkerchief for a duster. Oh, I have known women of that sort, and they are a plague! Commend me to a woman who runs her finger along the ledges of doors and shelves, and then holds it up with such an air of righteous triumph. Don’t I pity Mrs. Dumble, and Jonathan too, now?’

‘Well,’ said I, ‘she had better dust the prayer-book than the doctrine that is preached from it. Sometimes the great lady of the parish thinks it her place to keep the clergyman in order, as well as the church.’

‘Your father will soon settle that,’ said my mother, with proper wifely pride. ‘I never knew a man who could hold his

own better. Not a whole bench of women-bishops could make him alter a thing, either in the church or out of it, if he had once made up his mind to it. He has the strongest will I ever came across in matters that he considers important.'

'They wouldn't make him alter anything, Phyllis,' said my Aunt Sunshine; 'but they would worry the very life out of him in trying to do it, and out of you too. I always say a wife carries the heaviest end of the burden, when people begin to nag at her husband. But we need not give poor Lady Matilda the credit of being so bad. Let us hope she will be content with keeping the dust from the outside of her prayer-book, and leave wiser people than herself to attend to the rest. Then next Tuesday, Anne, you and I will call. I will come here for you about four.'

‘I will be ready,’ said Anne, as calmly as though the call were only to be upon little Bennie Bolton. I believe nothing that came to her in the way of duty ever did ruffle the even current of her self-possession. And she never worried over things that could not be helped. I think Providence must have intended her from the first for a clergyman’s wife.

CHAPTER IX.

MOTHER and I paid our visit to the Hall the very next day, and father went with us, to get it over, as he said.

Shall I say that I was horrified, or only very much amused, when I found that Lady Matilda Rakeridge of Willoughby Hall, and our Cassandra of the woodland path, were one and the same person? I think the amusement had the best of it, especially when I found that her ladyship did not in the least recognise me. I knew her at the very first glance. There was no mistaking that tall, well-set-up figure,

although the long cloak and the bag and the umbrella were absent, nor those almost semi-circular eyebrows, nor that high-pitched nose, nor that equally high-pitched voice which had such a ring of authority even about its mildest tones. How thankful I was that we had none of us attempted to defend ourselves from the torrent of reproach which she brought to bear upon us in the wood, because now my speech did not betray me. Neither did my dress, for I always went to church in a bonnet, that being the rule of those days, and now I wore my best of possible hats, together with my other best things, as was fitting for a call upon the newly-married mistress of the Hall and the daughter of an earl, too. But I mentally determined that before next Sunday, when they would have to appear in church again, the two bonnets which had met

Lady Matilda, Aunt Sunshine's and mine, should be so altered and re-trimmed that neither they nor the faces inside them should be known again for the same. And I did this out of the purest consideration for Lady Matilda herself, for I thought she would be so distressed if she ever found out that she had been misjudging us in that cruel manner. I came to know her better afterwards, and to understand that a good scolding, to whomsoever administered, was a thing she never repented of.

On this occasion, however, she was very kind and courteous. True, the cloven foot made itself manifest in the shape of a few stringent remarks upon my father's manner of conducting the service, a manner differing, she said, from that to which she had herself been accustomed in town; but a little judicious management on my mo-

ther's part turned the current of the conversation upon the condition and prospects of the agricultural poor, who, not being present, could not feel hurt by her ladyship's opinion of them. She had studied that subject, too, and had strong opinions upon it, almost as strong as those she held upon the necessity of regular Sunday afternoon church-going. In short, she impressed us as a woman who held nothing but strong views upon any subject at all, and who would fight not only those who disagreed with her, but also those who agreed to an extent short of her own strength.

For the rest, we had some frightfully strong tea out of the daintiest possible egg-shell china cups, and some filmy bread and butter, and then we took our leave, my lady smiling upon us with the kindly authoritative manner of one who knows that she has the whip-hand of you, and can

make you feel it if she likes, even though she may not be able to make you go her own way in everything.

‘Father,’ I said, when we were once more breathing freely outside the Hall garden, ‘do you remember our telling you about that curious woman in the wood, last Sunday?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, then, it was Lady Matilda.’

‘I am not in the least surprised,’ said my father; and he said no more.

Seeing that he was not disposed to talk, my mother and I chatted between ourselves, avoiding subjects that would worry him. There was enough to talk about, for the Hall had been entirely re-furnished by Mr. Rakeridge, just before his marriage, from one of the best establishments in London, so that we, in our simple, country quietness, were now privileged to behold

what manner of carpets, curtains, chairs and tables Belgravia itself affected. And also, which I think was more surprising to us, the fashion in which these articles were disposed. Now, for the first time, I beheld a drawing-room centre-table cast down from its dignity and banished into a corner, in order that chairs might be dotted about in picturesque little groups all over the room, for the better prosecution of after-dinner gossip. And the piano, which tradition had with us from time immemorial assigned to a position against the wall, was drawn out into the open, so that performers thereupon might boldly face the company, instead of singing or playing, as before, to the paper-hangings. And the curtains were draped with audacious disregard of custom, and books were piled together on the floor, instead of being ranged in due circles upon the deposed

table; and you might stumble over any number of tiny little tea-poy's and foot-stools, and the mantelshelf was shrouded, like a half-developed window, in curtains and fringes, and there was a general air of strangeness and yet prodigality of comfort about the whole room, which, at any rate for my mother and myself, diverted our thoughts from Lady Matilda and the plagues she might bring upon us.

The first thing I did when we got home was to thrust our own drawing-room table into a corner, and group the chairs, and re-drape the curtains, and pile some of father's big folios upon the floor, and produce a general sort of artistic effect in place of the absolute neatness and regularity in which we had hitherto delighted. I was succeeding to my entire satisfaction when the late post came, and brought a letter for my father from India.

It was from a friend who was to him almost like a brother, a Major Consett, serving now with his regiment in the North-West Provinces. He was coming home some time in the spring with his only and motherless child, Seline, and we all expected this letter would tell us what mail would bring them.

Instead, it told us that Major Consett had been ordered to the front, some Afghan difficulties having lately begun, and it was quite uncertain when he would be able to obtain leave at all. But he said that, as he had already made arrangements for breaking up his household and coming home, he should still send Seline, both on account of the difficulty of providing a suitable home for her out there, and also that she might escape the hot weather which she had found so trying the season before. She was to return by the mail which

arrived in London the last week of April, some friends from Lahore taking charge of her for the voyage, and she was to stay with them until the steamer sailed, as Major Consett himself had to start with his regiment without a day's delay.

He wished to know if my father would meet Seline in London and bring her down to Willoughby Clays for a time. If we could have her with us all through the summer, until he could return and make a home for her, he said he should feel it a great boon; but, if my parents could not arrange that, he hoped they would secure a quiet home for her where she could both have motherly care and sisterly companionship.

It was an important matter, and we all assembled, as usual, to talk about it.

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‘I shall of course meet Seline,’ said my father, ‘and bring her down here for

awhile. But about her staying with us for six months, what do you say to that, my dear ?'

My mother was silent for awhile. She never rushed into things, nor made professions of readiness for self-sacrifice. If a thing was necessary, she would do it, but with no gilding of fine words.

'It depends very much upon Seline herself,' she said, at last. 'If, after living for years near a gay station like Lahore, she can settle down to quiet country life with us, I shall be very glad to have her. But I am afraid she will find it rather different from what she has been accustomed to. No balls, no parties, no afternoon dances. Do you think she will take kindly to it?'

'That is Seline's affair, not ours. She shall come and try, at any rate, and, if we are too dull for her, I can but write out and ask old Brian to make some other

arrangements. Poor old Brian ! I am sorry for him, ordered off in the very face of home. And those Afghans are a nasty lot. He was up amongst them once before. I wish him safely out of it. I will write at once and tell him it is all right for Seline to come to us.'

'There is no time, father,' said Anne, mindful, as usual, of dates and details. 'This is near the end of March, and, let me see, when is Easter this year?'

'April the thirteenth,' I said, quickly. No need for me to calculate that date, for was it not to be a red-letter day, Mr. Forrester coming to spend it with us? And then I was vexed with myself, for I felt the colour rising in my face. Yet if I remembered the date and they did not, why should I not hurry to tell them? And for the red, they might not see it. I am sure Anne did not.'

ther the motherless girl, who was even now on her way to us for a home, would soon be fatherless too.

CHAPTER X.

My mother was a woman of a practical turn of mind, and, whether Major Consett was to return victoriously from this campaign or not, the kindest thing she could do for him now was to prepare a comfortable home for his only child.

‘Marjorie,’ she said to me, ‘Seline shall have the little room over the porch, with the dressing-room out of it. The dressing-room shall be made into a sort of little boudoir for her. I believe in India ladies spend a good deal of time in their own rooms; and I should like her to feel she

is not obliged to be always with us. There is nothing so trying to some people as having to talk and be sociable when they would rather be alone.'

'I think both rooms will want papering and painting,' I suggested; 'the sun has faded every bit of colour out of them.'

'Never mind, we will have that done. Seline ought to have a warm room, so that will be the very one for her. And both windows have such a pretty view of the hills. I should like her to see that we have taken some thought in preparing a pleasant place for her. Poor child! she has no one in the world but her father, and we cannot tell how soon she may lose him now.'

For really we were beginning quite to take for granted that Major Consett never would return from that Afghan campaign. In imagination, I already beheld Seline

dressed in mourning, and given over to unavailing tears. I suppose it was because we had first heard of her coming to us in connection with her father's departure for the seat of war, that this impression had fixed itself upon our minds.

'If anything *should* happen to him, mother,' said Anne, 'Seline would stay with us always, would she not?'

'If she wished to do so, I would certainly make a home for her. Her father was your father's dearest friend.'

Even my mother spoke of him in the past tense. Had his death been already announced in the *Gazette*, we could not have dwelt upon it with more certainty.

'Poor girl!' continued Anne. 'But, if she did stay with us always, what a help she might be in the parish. We do so want some one who will take a real interest in things.'

This was said without the slightest reflection upon me. Anne had no meanesses of that kind. It had been tacitly accepted for years that we two divided our duties, she taking the parochial, I the home department. She was my father's right hand in all matters of detail. She kept accounts, managed classes, arranged and organised the Sunday school, visited the sick and ailing ; was, in fact, an unpaid curate, and therefore we never claimed her time for domestic matters, though she had in her the making of as good a house-keeper as any of us. It was I who came to the front when either of the maids fell ill, or went for a holiday ; I who developed unusual activity at cleaning times ; I who dusted the drawing-room, struck out changes in the position of chairs and tables, helped our mother with the necessary arrangements when there was a din-

ner-party; and, so far as in me lay, sheltered her, even as Anne sheltered my father, from the mechanical anxieties which were now becoming wearisome to them both.

‘I do hope she will have a love for parish work,’ continued Anne. ‘If she has, I almost think the two of us might do instead of the curate father is talking about. I am sure he would a great deal rather not have one, and it would be more comfortable for us all. Now, if Seline could take the religious instruction in the day-schools for an hour, twice a week, and I could manage that Saturday afternoon service at the brickfields, I am sure there need not be a curate.’

My mother smiled.

‘You are laying out a tolerably large sphere of work for her, Anne. I am afraid young ladies in India are not, as a rule,

accustomed to undertake the religious instruction in day-schools. And then we must make allowances for Seline's bringing-up.'

Anne's countenance fell.

'Oh! mother, do you really think she will not take an interest in the parish?'

'I cannot tell, my dear; but I think you must not take it for granted. You know she was educated in Paris, at one of the convent schools, and then she lived for a year with a lady, a friend of her mother, who introduced her into society and looked after her outfit, and all that sort of thing, before she went out to her father in India, so that you see she has not been trained to know much about a country parish. I only saw her once, when she was brought over to England from Paris, to stay with an aunt who is dead now. She was a bright, merry, delightful little child, and I

should think she would develop into a charming girl; but about being very useful I cannot tell. If she should be willing to learn, that is all we can expect.'

'Yes, and then consider,' I said, 'what an anxious mind she must have. Even if her father has not been killed already, how can she tell but that any time the news of his death may be telegraphed. Anne, just fancy what you and I would feel if father were in a campaign and we were eight or ten thousand miles away from him. Do you think we should care to take any interest in parish matters, or undertake religious instructions in the day-schools? I am sure I could never do it. I should just be moping all day and thinking of him.'

'People are different,' said Anne. 'I think if I had a great anxiety I should work all the harder, just to keep it out of

my thoughts, that is, if I could not make it any better by thinking about it. But of course we cannot tell anything; we must just leave it until she comes. I *do* hope, though, she will want to be useful.'

Then my mother went into the study to make some arrangements there, and Anne and I talked the whole thing over in its more personal aspect. Because, parish considerations excluded, it was a serious matter to have what might be called a third sister coming amongst us for an indefinite time, perhaps for always. And our Cassandra, Lady Matilda Rakeridge, with all that she might possibly prove for or against us, passed for the time out of our thoughts.

Aunt Sunshine drove me next day to Stilbury, and there we chose the very loveliest paper for the two little rooms, a soft olive green with jasmine leaves and

buds straying over it. Then Debitt, Mrs. Dumble's brother, who lived in the village, was to paint the wood-work to correspond. The painting and papering asked for new curtains, but that was no difficulty, for my mother was one of the most industrious netters I ever knew. In our linen-room upstairs were bundles and bundles of netted curtains of all degrees of fineness, sorted and tied together in pairs, ready for 'getting up' whenever they should be needed. It was only to starch and spread a couple of pairs and put them up over linings of Turkey red muslin, to make those two rooms, with the warm sunlight pouring through their windows, a perfect nest of rosy comfort.

But that spreading was a business, and mother and I always did it ourselves. In our part of the country, and in those days, gentlewomen were not ashamed of putting

their own hands to all the daintier parts of laundry work, nor of letting other people know that they did so. When mother had spent hours and hours over netting those curtains, and when every inch of them had a separate thought, hope, or memory worked into it, she was not very likely to hand the whole thing over to one of your paid washerwomen to be dragged and pulled and driven at so much a pair, as if it was a piece of machine-work that could be matched for pounds, shillings, and pence at any respectable upholsterer's shop. No indeed. But when the fabric had been duly washed and starched by one of the maids, mother and I carried it up in state to the big spare attic, and stretched it out on a sheet to the required compass, and then, patiently kneeling upon our knees, we drew out every single separate loop, all up and down the sides and ends, only with

natural human frailty skipping over the top a little, where it would be hidden under the fringes of the curtain pole. My mother was a long time before she would give in to that skipping. She would fain have gone all the way round, on the same principle that the old Greeks did their work, remembering that the gods see everywhere, and have made me do the same ; but with degenerate modern hurry I insisted upon scamping my work as regarded the top, and was content if the edges of three sides manifested themselves with perfect regularity. Then we left it to itself for the night, and next morning, when we carefully lifted it from the sheet, it was a marvel of snowy reticulation, firm, symmetrical, regular as a piece of frosted silver work, and good to keep its whiteness for a twelvemonth when it was once carefully hung. Oh, the housewifely triumph

of taking those netted curtains up, the morning after their spreading! I can recall it now, and the admiration with which year after year, as the cleaning time came round, we looked upon the result of our labours.

‘I think,’ said my mother, as we knelt over our handiwork in the big attic, whilst the paperers were busy at work below, ‘I think I shall let Mr. Forrester have those two little rooms when he comes at Easter. I am sure he would rather be there than in the great guest-room. And that guest-room does take such a deal of preparing. It is a morning’s work for the housemaid to get all the covers off the things. And he is not a man who cares to be made a stranger of. What do you think, Marjorie?’

‘I am sure he would not care,’ I said, with such indifference as I could summon.

‘It will be ever so much more cheerful than the other room, because there is more sun. Mr. Forrester will only be staying—how long?’

‘From Saturday to Monday at the farthest. Dr. Hatherley has appointed Saturday afternoon for the interview ; and he goes on, I suppose, to his own home early on Monday.’

‘Where is his own home?’ I asked, for at present we only knew of him in connection with that grammar-school up in the north.

‘I am sure I do not know,’ said my mother. ‘Your father says there used to be a Mr. Forrester vicar of a large town parish in Yorkshire, and very likely that is our Mr. Forrester’s father.’

‘Our Mr. Forrester.’ How pleasantly that sounded. I could have told my mother, however, that there was no Mr.

Forrester anywhere in a Yorkshire vicarage now. for I had searched that county through in the Clergy List to find out what I could about Aunt Sunshine's visitor, and no such name appeared, though I judged from what he said himself that his father had been a clergyman, and in a crowded district too. That was how he came to interest himself in the condition of the poor.

‘I should think,’ continued my mother, going back to her housekeeping. ‘that for two or three days he would prefer being in those little rooms with the sun upon them. I shall leave it to you, Marjorie, to have everything arranged comfortably in the little dressing-room which is to be Seline's boudoir. You had better have the writing-table brought up from the morning-room, we can do very well without it there. And there are some bookshelves in one of the

attics, they will give the room a cosy look. And let a few good pictures be put up. I should like Seline to have things pretty about her.'

I promised I would do my best, though I may be forgiven if it was not the image of our Indian guest, with sable garments and weeping behaviour as I always pictured her now, which rose most frequently before my mind's eye as I considered what we could best spare from the rest of the house to make that room what my mother wished it to be, dainty, artistic, choice, and comfortable.

CHAPTER XI.

‘I THINK this curtain will do now,’ my mother said. ‘I am glad it is the last.’

And she stood up, straightening herself with just the faintest sigh of weariness. And then she went and sat in the casement window, through which the April sunlight was streaming, broadly and brightly.

Something in the tiredness of her voice made me look up. It was not so much a suggestion of physical fatigue, as of that other kind, which looks before and after, and can only be satisfied by the rest which is unbroken.

For the first time the thought came over me that things could not always be as they were now. I bent down over my work, mechanically drawing out the loops and arranging them as heretofore, but the vision of that little room and what I could do in it, the Easter-tide hopes which had come thronging in golden clouds only a moment or two before, seemed to fall away, and another life, other possibilities, replaced them. I felt as I had never felt before, that the bond which linked us all so closely together, father, mother, sister Anne, and myself, would sooner or later have to be broken; that this little sigh of weariness, unconscious though it might be, was as the cloud no bigger than a man's hand, which might by-and-by cover my whole sky with blackness.

Strange it is what trifles can press upon us the thought of a surely coming future.

Stranger still, that, life being what it is, the thought of change and separation is not more constantly present with us. Here was I, a girl of twenty, an unbroken chain of memory binding me to one home, childhood springing into youth, youth blossoming into girlhood, under the same roof-tree, beside the same hearthstone, our parents' watchful look of love an unfailing benediction around us. And funerals, many a one, had come in their season to the churchyard whose gravestones were visible from my own little window, funerals which meant homes broken up, husbands and wives separated, children orphaned, brothers and sisters scattered. Yet until just now, seeing my mother with head a little wearily bent, sitting in the stream of sunlight which came through the casement window, the fact of our own part in the general lot of humanity had never been

with convincing force borne in upon me.

I had never realised that any other grave, save that which bore little Davie's name, would be visited by us; that tears of ours would be shed, sooner or later, over relics of a past not so far away, not so softened and sanctified by mist of years, as those which were locked in the drawer in our parents' room, much still to them, but almost like a dream to sister Anne and myself.

In that moment, as I knelt there, bending lower so that the tears which filled my eyes might not be noticed, the past and future seemed to flash like an open vision upon me. The past so sunned by the most unselfish love that life can ever know, the future with all its unseen brightnesses, hopes, joys just now awakening for me, yet surely one day to be unaccompanied,

save in memory, by that holiest love. It seemed to me now, as if in the light of a sudden revelation, that any joy in which my mother had not part, any hope to which she was not admitted, was an act of unfaith, disloyalty to her. It seemed that no future, however bright, could copy the steady love, the unfailing devotion of the past.

Then the vision closed. I was a girl again, standing in the present, with a girl's hopes, vague as yet, unexpressed, almost unacknowledged, but so full of the glow and glory which seems too bright ever to fade. Once more my thoughts gathered into the little room which I was to make so bright, but not for Seline Consett. I was again busy over my housewifely spreading of curtains, the curtains which were to look like frosted silver over their rosy linings. And it was the labour of

helping me with those curtains which had made my mother give that sigh of weariness. And she knew nothing of what it all meant to me. I was opening the door for a life to which she, who had done so much, borne so much for me, was a stranger.

Now we were not a demonstrative family. One and all we kept our feelings to ourselves. I believe it was our pride to do so. Aunt Sunshine, who was cast in a different mould, used sometimes to say she did not know what to make of us. If we were glad, we were quiet. If we were sorry, we were quiet. If anything offended us, we were quiet. If anything stirred up our affections, at least ought to have stirred them up, we were still only quiet, nothing more than quiet. We were the sort of people, she said, who ought to live for ever, because our emotions never made

any visible demand upon us. We never fussed or excited ourselves over anything.

And she was so far right that, except in our morning and evening partings and greetings, on our birthdays, or on the rare occasions of our setting forth upon, or returning from, railway journeys, we were never in the habit of kissing or embracing each other. Why we manifested our feelings in this way when it was a railway journey, and not when the separation was accomplished by a pony-carriage, I cannot tell, except that one had more fear of railway accidents, and our dear little Hector, though spirited, was as safe as the church tower. But we never went even to Stilebury by train without a duly affectionate farewell, though when we drove to Burstborough, which was twice as far, a smile

and a wave of the hand was considered sufficient.

But something came over me now which I could not resist. I went to my mother as she sat there, wearied, in the sunshine, and I put my arms round her neck and kissed her, and I said,

‘Mother, you shall not be tired again. I will always do it for you, now.’

My mother kissed me, but said nothing. I kept my arm round her, and felt rather than saw that the tears were in her eyes, too. I think we both of us knew, though not a word was spoken about it, that this kiss given and taken meant much ; that it was a recognition both of the past and the future.

Then we came away, for the curtains needed no more care of ours until next morning, when we were to put them up.

But ever after that there was a new and beautiful feeling, all the more precious because we never talked about it, between my mother and myself.

CHAPTER XII.

I DO not think I ever had a happier time in my life than whilst I was a-preparing that little dressing-room over the porch. There was a big easy-chair to be covered and polished up, because, as my mother said, people, even young girls, who had lived in India, always liked chairs that gave them room enough to lounge. And we fetched in the writing-table out of the morning-room, and over it I hung my favourite etching of Sintram and his companions. The bookshelves, too, were hunted out of the attic, furnished with such material as I thought would meet Mr. Forrester's

taste, my own special copy of the 'Fairy Queen' not being forgotten. Browning also I brought, and some philosophical volumes out of the study. It was in my mind to put a cigar-stand on the mantel-shelf, but after consideration I left that for my father to arrange.

'I am sure Seline will be very comfortable here,' said Anne, coming into the room as I was putting some finishing touches to the folds of the curtains. 'Nothing could be prettier than that Turkey red under the netting. It sends such a warm glow into the room, and makes a contrast with the landscape outside. I fancy, too, they use a great deal of it in India, so she will be reminded of old times. But do you think she will care for Mill and Darwin?'

And Anne proceeded to take a survey of the literary provender.

‘I rather had an idea such books were more for men. I am sure I have never read them myself, though they have been in the study for years. You know mother said Seline was what they call “charming,” and somehow that sort of thing does not seem to go with tough books like these.’

‘Never mind,’ I said, ‘we can change them afterwards, if they do not suit her taste. I believe it is the fashion now for charming people to know something about everything, so that she may like to have them remain as a tribute to her superior capabilities. And then, you know, mother says Mr. Forrester is to be put into these rooms when he comes at Easter.’

‘Oh, dear, yes! I had quite forgotten that. Of course Mr. Forrester is able to digest anything we can give him in the way of philosophy. He comes for Easter-

day, why, that is the Sunday after next. Oh ! and, Marjorie, we must settle about the decorations. Lady Matilda said she should like to help, and she will send flowers down from the Hall.'

'That means she will want to be at the top of everything, and upset all our own little plans, and tell us what to do, and get offended with us if we will not do it. But, Anne, I will *not* give up the font to anyone. All the Lady Matildas in the world shall not do me out of my ivy tracery. She must understand so much.'

'I don't think she will object. For peace's sake I shall give up the chancel if she wishes to undertake that, and, if she has all the east end her own way, I think you will be free of the west. Shall we settle now, as soon as you have done those curtains, who are to be asked to bring

flowers? Little Emma Dumble must gather daffodils for the lectern.'

'And Jonathan must have his crop of them over the old rector's monument. I do hope her ladyship won't interfere with that. I have finished the curtains now, Anne, so if you like we can go into the village and arrange with the people who are to help us.'

Which we did, and everything was planned as comfortably as possible, when a note was sent from the Hall, asking Anne and myself to go up there, to consult with Lady Matilda about the decorations. And the end of it was that everything was upset, and we had no end of worry, and going backwards and forwards, and Lady Matilda hunted out innumerable books and designs; and, as soon as one was fixed upon, another one was produced, until our patience was fairly wearied out,

and, but for Mr. Forrester, I could have wished that there was no such word as Easter in the calendar.

But it came, and he came with it. My father drove over to Burstborough to meet him, and they were to see Dr. Hatherley and get that important interview over before coming to the rectory at all. We supposed they might arrive about four in the afternoon, and I wanted to work hard, and get my share of the decorations finished, so that I might have the rest of the day free. But we had no sooner gone into the church, with our store of materials, ready to carry out, so far as we were able, Lady Matilda's wishes, than she swept down upon us herself, with almost a cart-load of plants, and an entirely new scheme of arrangement, which, she said, had suggested itself to her after our last consultation, and which was vastly superior to

anything we had been able to strike out before, though it might take a little more time to carry it into effect.

We were to have an ascending scale of potted plants in the east window, tall in the middle, and sloping down towards each side. And a tree-fern in front of the Ten Commandments, and another, to match it, in front of the Creed. And the screen was to be one blaze of daffodils, its wood-work outlined with them,—I am sure her ladyship had borrowed the outlining idea from me, though she was going to carry it out differently,—with a knot of scarlet azalea at each point where the lines intersected. Then the pulpit, a lovely piece of black oak carving, was to be completely covered with daffodils, which happened to be plentiful in the Hall plantations that spring; so that, when it was completed, it would, to my thinking, present very

much the appearance of a magnified yellow tulip, in the centre of which my dear father's figure would develop itself at sermon time like an overgrown pistil. The windows were each to blossom into a splendour of purple and red, azaleas being plentiful in the Hall greenhouses, as daffodils were in its plantations; and every boss of carved work down the pew-ends of the centre aisle was to be surmounted by a cluster of flowers, crimson and gold alternately.

‘I assure you, my dear girls, it will be most striking. I lay awake for hours the night before last, carrying it out in my own mind. You see, as this is my first Easter in the parish, I should like to do something original, and I do not at all grudge the trouble. By Christmas I hope we shall be in a condition to produce a still better effect; but then we must have

a committee for weeks beforehand, and have everything planned out. We shall also, I hope, by that time have a curate who will act as secretary, and carry out the details. A parish like this really does require a curate, if the machinery is to be worked with anything like energy and precision. I have quite made up my mind that there must be a curate, and I have asked some of my friends to be on the look-out for a suitable person, subject, of course, to your father's approval. Now, for instance, those Sunday schools——'

But when her ladyship got upon the Sunday schools I edged my way aside from the rood screen, already beginning to blaze with daffodils, and slipped quietly down to the font, which I had succeeded in keeping to myself, spite of our Cassandra who would have made that also, like the rest of the church, not a harmony, but the reverse,

in yellow and purple. Only the day before I had been to that particular spot on the moor hills by Mrs. Bolton's cottage, where the small, white-edged ivy was to be found, and had brought away as much as I thought would outline my iron-work up to the very top. And well it was that I did so, for, towards afternoon of that Easter-eve, the clouds, which had been lowering all day, descended in a drenching rain, and no ivy would have been possible, except to a determination greater than my own.

I worked away happily enough there at the west end by myself, thankful that I had taken time by the forelock in gathering my leafy harvest. Aunt Sunshine was busy with her windows. Lady Matilda was haranguing my patient sister Anne about the state of the schools and the necessity of a curate to take the religious

instruction. Her voice gave one a feeling of unrest, like the windy rain outside. My own thoughts comforted me, for they were full of hope, the hope which only comes to us when we are young and inexperienced. When my fingers ached, I used to stand still awhile and look at St. Christopher in his narrow lancet window in the north aisle.—St. Christopher going across the river with the child Christ on his shoulder. Ever since I could remember anything, that window had been my delight. We looked down to it from my corner of the rectory pew. When we were children, my mother had told us the story of it. I loved it then for a certain dimness and mystery about it, for the sun, except on summer evenings, never got round to shine through the purple of St. Christopher's robe, nor the misty green of the quaint up and down waves, nor the glory round the head

of the Child. There was always a sombre seriousness about it, as of difficulty, labour, and distress, though we knew that these were all to end in victory.

Rarely, very rarely, the sun shone through upon the blue hills across the river, but I had never seen it shine there yet, nor even kindle the child Christ's glory into gold. He and the saint who bore Him seemed for ever in a twilight of trial and uncertainty. My mother always told me that the sunlight *did* come through it if we could only be there at the right time to see; and then St. Christopher's face was as the face of an angel, and the hills across the river like the blue of Heaven itself. Still, I had never seen them so.

I was working away diligently at my font-cover when, to my disappointment, I discovered that my store of ivy would not carry me more than two-thirds of the way.

I called Aunt Sunshine from her windows to sympathise with me.

‘Was ever anything so provoking? And I did so want to outline it right up to the very top where the chains begin. It will look such a half-and-half thing now.’

‘Yes, and what is worse still, Lady Matilda will say, “I told you so.” I think it is always worse than the failure itself, to have people repeat that formula to you. Are there no ivy leaves but those by Mrs. Bolton’s cottage?’

‘None that will do for me. And, if there were, I could not go out in this drenching rain to gather them.’

‘No. I should almost think the ducks must be getting wet through, and what about your poor father and Mr. Forrester I do not know, for I should think they will be on their way home by now, and, if Mr. Forrester hasn’t got over his liability

to gum-boils, this is the very afternoon for the cold to strike through and give him one. Now, if it had been anything like a day, I would have put the pony in with the greatest of pleasure, and driven you myself to get that ivy; but with a rain like this one would scarcely send a cat out, and Jessie so delicate.'

'You must not think of it, auntie,' I said. 'I shall leave the font just as it is, only I do wish Mr. Forrester could have seen it as we really intended it to be. He will think I have been making much ado to very little purpose, when he sees such a half-finished thing.'

'What is the matter?' cried Lady Matilda from the other end of the church, in that shrill, high-pitched voice which had smitten us so unmercifully in the Willoughby woods. 'Has anything happened?'

‘No, only I am stuck fast in the middle of my font,’ I replied. ‘The ivy-leaves have given out, and there is ever so much more to be done.’

Her ladyship came down from the chancel steps where she was superintending the rood screen, and looked critically at my small piece of performance.

‘Oh! my dear girl,’ she said, with that funny little twitch of the eyebrows and head which she always used when she wanted to shake off her *pince-nez*, ‘you are too fond of trivial detail in your decoration. Now you see you have spent nearly a day over this, and yet the effect is, as one may say, feeble. You know, in church decoration, boldness of general effect is the chief thing to be aimed at. What did you aim at in this?’

Lady Matilda asked the question as severely as though she was convinced my

aim had been the breaking of one of the Ten Commandments.

‘ Only to get my font-cover entirely outlined with small ivy-leaves,’ I replied. ‘ You see I have got it covered two-thirds of the way up ; but I cannot carry it on any further.’

‘ And so it produces no effect,’ said Lady Matilda, putting on her glasses again and making a tour of the font. ‘ Well, never mind. I think I can improve it for you. We can spare a few daffodils and azaleas from the rood screen, and if you arrange them in judicious masses on the apex of the cover, they will give dignity to the whole. You see, as it is, I should call it *niggling*. But do not be discouraged. You know everything must have a beginning, and so must experience in church decoration. I will send one of the children down with some flowers, and, if you arrange

them as I have suggested, your font will soon look quite a different thing.'

There was no doubt of that, I thought to myself, as Lady Matilda shook the spectacles off again and went back to her rood screen. But I was not going to have knops and bunches of yellow and purple on my beautiful bit of old ironwork.

'If I can't finish it as I like, I won't finish it at all,' I said, doggedly. 'It shall go just as it is.'

'And very much better so,' said my Aunt Sunshine. 'After all, it doesn't look so very unfinished. It only gives one the idea that the ivy has begun to grow, but hasn't quite got to the top. I am sure Mr. Forrester will like it a great deal better so, than with the flowers stuck about in bunches, and I would rather take his taste in such matters than Lady Matilda's. Just leave it as it is, my dear, and come over

with me to the south aisle. I am almost as much embarrassed by too many flowers as you are by too few leaves. Do help me to make the windows on that side look rather less like a row of market gardener's baskets.'

I did so, and for a couple of hours we worked away like anything, though at the end of the time, even with all our efforts, our beautiful old church rather resembled a Mechanic's Institute decked out for a fancy fair. But we had already discovered that it was better to let Lady Matilda have her own way, so long as she only interfered with the external fabric. When she began to dust the clergyman as well as the church, it would be time to put the drag on.

Later on in the afternoon, tired and a little sullen too, for my temper was not so even as Aunt Sunshine's, I came back to have a farewell look at my font. It was really

not so bad after all, and, contrasted with the violence of colouring in the rest of the church, I thought there was a certain artistic simplicity about it. Aunt Sunshine's suggestion gave the design a life-like air. It did seem as if the ivy were growing and would find its way up to the top of the canopy, if only one could stand and watch it long enough. I was fingering the delicate stems and guiding them a little where they had sprung away from the iron work, when I heard the heavy west door creak upon its hinges. The curtains behind me were pushed aside, and a great cluster of my coveted white veined ivy leaves was reached out in front of me, whilst as yet I could not see whence it came.

‘There, child, I was determined you should have them.’

Turning, I saw Mr. Forrester, the wet

dropping in little pools upon the pavement from his Inverness.

‘Mrs. Haseltine told me you were all busy here over the decorating, so I came across, and just as I opened the door you were bemoaning to Miss Newcourt that your leaves had run short, so I set off at once to the moor hills, where I remember you said it grows. Now, shall I help you to finish?’

Just then a great burst of sunshine came in through the west window, and turned the raindrops on the ivy leaves to emerald and diamond. Then it died away, but we had our own sunshine afterwards, and I don’t think the time seemed long to us, though the evening shadows were beginning to creep about in the church before Lady Matilda and my sister Anne finished the rood screen and came down to our end.

‘A slightly frivolous effect still,’ said her ladyship; Mr. Forrester had withdrawn a few paces, and was reading the inscriptions on the monuments. ‘Niggling, as I said before, and with not sufficient boldness. In fact, it is a case of carving heads upon a cherry stone. You would have made a much better thing of it if you had carried out my suggestions and had a few massy groups of daffodils interspersed with azalea as a relief to the prevailing flatness. But we will manage it better another time. You see I have had a good deal of experience in London churches, and they do these things on entirely a different line there. Good-bye, my dear girls, and *will* you please see that there is fresh water put into all the flower glasses first thing to-morrow morning? I told Dumble to attend to it, but he said he had never been accustomed to take any such trouble. And you know

nothing is to be done in a church without trouble, absolutely nothing. It is such a mistake, Miss Marjorie, not to keep a man like Dumble up to the mark.'

And Lady Matilda walked away, just drawing her finger-tip along the ledge of the nearest pew as she passed, and then examining her glove. I think it had become a habit with her to do this sort of thing; indeed, Aunt Sunshine said she did it when she went to make calls, as if by a sort of instinct.

When she had disappeared, Mr. Forrester came back to us at the font.

'Mr. Forrester,' I asked. 'Do you know that lady?'

'Of course I do, just as well as if she had her umbrella and black bag, and all the rest of it. She is the Cassandra who gave us our scolding in the plantation four Sunday afternoons ago.'

‘Yes; and more than that, she is Lady Matilda Rakeridge, of Willoughby Hall.’

‘Then I wish you joy, for I am sure you will all be well attended to, both as to morals and behaviour. And now, do let us go across to the rectory, and forget all about her.’

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER that happy surprise in the church, I did not see much more of Mr. Forrester. My father, who, when he took to anyone at all, took very firmly, kept him very much to himself. There were long talks in the study, long pacings up and down the garden-walk under the churchyard yew-trees, long discussions at meal-times upon educational matters, or the condition and prospects of the poor, a subject to which Mr. Forrester seemed to devote plenty of thought as well as action.

I never asked myself why I was begin-

ning to feel not only satisfaction but pride in hearing him talk, nor why, mentally, I always took his side in any argument, and was glad when my father would yield to it. For, in a general way, there was nothing I disliked so much as argument. It never influenced me in the least. I had my own ideas about things, and, though logic might most conclusively prove that they were wrong, logic could never make me alter them, not even if the logic were Mr. Forrester's.

My mother said the interview with Dr. Hatherley had been very satisfactory. He had told my father afterwards that he should certainly use his influence on Mr. Forrester's side. That meant that the question was as good as settled, for the elective committee would not be likely to go against the clearly-expressed opinion of so important a person as the head-master.

But we kept our own counsel on the matter.

Aunt Sunshine came as usual to dine with us on Easter-Day. Though she had handed her guest over to us, she did not at all cease to consider him as in some sort belonging to herself, and great was her delight at the prospect of having him permanently established at so short a distance from us as Burstborough. As a special offering to him on this Sunday, she had brought over the last dish of her splendid old Ribston apples, and we were busy discussing them when Mr. Forrester inquired about the earliest train by which he could conveniently leave for the north next morning.

My father, who was a methodical person in his invitations, as in most other things, had only asked him to stay with us from Saturday to Monday, taking for granted

that he would wish to spend as much as possible of his holidays with his own family and friends. It was an embarrassing thing, he said, for a guest not to know how long he was expected to remain, and, besides, our acquaintance with Mr. Forrester was so slight that there was no object in asking him to prolong his visit over the time necessary for business. Still, as Dr. Hatherley had appointed Saturday afternoon for the interview, and there were no convenient evening trains for the north, we were in courtesy bound to keep him over the Sunday, and he was equally in courtesy bound to make arrangements for his departure as soon as possible after.

‘We shall be sorry to lose you,’ said my mother, with kindly hospitality, ‘and we should have been very glad, if you could have spent a day or two longer with us ; but I suppose your own people would not

thank us for trying to keep you longer than necessary from your home. One always seems to want to gather home at these festival times.'

'I have no home, Mrs. Haseltine. And I have no people, either.'

Mr. Forrester said this quite simply, yet with such a touch of unconscious sadness in his voice, that for a moment or two we were all silent. Aunt Sunshine never controlled her feelings so much as the rest of us, and I saw her wipe a distinctly visible tear out of the corner of her eye. My mother expressed her sympathy in a more practical way.

'Then if you have no home, Mr. Forrester,' she said, 'you are not obliged to hurry away to it. Will you make our house your home for a few days longer? My husband only named from Saturday to Monday, as we thought your own friends

would be anxious for your return, but we should be very glad if you could stay. David, you will do what you can to keep Mr. Forrester, will you not ?

‘It will be a real pleasure to me if Mr. Forrester will stay.’

This was all my father said, but he said it so as to make it enough. There was no mistaking his entire good-will and cordiality. Something kept me from joining in the general chorus of consent, though I felt that Mr. Forrester looked across to me before he gave any reply.

‘You are very kind,’ he said, at last, ‘but I am not going to have any holidays this time. I have made arrangements for going into Yorkshire, to give private lessons to a young man who wishes to get into one of the universities. We begin on Wednesday.’

‘That is a pity for us,’ said my father,

‘but you can stay here until the day after to-morrow, at any rate, and then you will still be in plenty of time. It is but a three hours’ journey from here to the north of Yorkshire.’

‘Thank you; I should have been very glad.’

Ah! that tiresome conditional mood, how it did seem to take the brightness out of things. If I had any idea that we were important or interesting enough to move Mr. Forrester from his duty, I was mistaken.

‘I should have been very glad, but I like to have time before beginning my work. It is not just to my pupil to start with him in a hurry. I want a day to talk over plans with him and find out what he is fit for. My credit is at stake, too. I am very anxious to get him through.’

‘All right,’ said my father. ‘I see you have the turning out of a head-master in you. I was made of that sort of stuff myself, and would have said just the same when I was a coach at Cambridge, thirty years ago. You shall be off, then, to-morrow morning, by the eleven train. But what do you say to coming to us for a week or so at midsummer?’

Mr. Forrester’s face brightened.

‘If I am fortunate enough to get this appointment, I shall be only too glad to do so. If not, I must work harder than ever at any sort of holiday engagement that I can pick up.’

‘I hope you will get it,’ said my father. ‘So far as I can see, things are moving in the right direction, and you may depend upon it that anything I can do for you will be done. If I had not got over that sort of foolishness, I think I could wager a bot-

tle of port that you will not need a holiday engagement at midsummer.'

And then we ladies came away.

'Only to think,' said Aunt Sunshine, as we looked out for the most comfortable easy-chairs, 'only to think of that poor man having neither home nor friends! The head-master up at the Yorkshire grammar-school never told me that. He only said he was pulled down in his health and wanted a change; and I was delighted to be able to do him a kindness. And now, just fancy, if his coming to Willoughby a waif and a stray, as one might express it, should lead to his being elected second master to the Burstborough school. And David says Dr. Hatherley is in favour of it.'

'Very much in favour of it.'

'Ah! then you will see it will come to pass. The committee will never go against

a popular man like Dr. Hatherley. Why, he has been the very making of the school. The shares have gone up, I don't know how much, since he came. You see in a new concern like the Burstborough school, where there are no foundations and bequests to go back upon, everything depends upon the head-master being popular; and when he *is* popular, he can do pretty much as he likes. I would venture a pair of gloves myself on that visit at midsummer, only like David I have given up that sort of foolishness. And the second master has a beautiful house in the college grounds, has he not ?'

'Yes, a very good one, I believe. You know there are three houses in the college grounds, and they all receive pupils. The second master's house can accommodate fifty or sixty. But I really never took much interest in it until David thought

about Mr. Forrester for the appointment. I have heard since then that the applications are very numerous, so I suppose the position is a desirable one.'

'Well, whatever it may be, Phyllis, one thing I am sure of, they cannot give it to a better man.'

And with that Aunt Sunshine settled down to her Sunday afternoon nap.

CHAPTER XIV.

FIRST thing after breakfast next morning, I went across to the church, to put fresh water to the flowers, and generally brighten up the decorations. Anne and I, as a rule, did it together, but she was busy over some parish work for my father this morning, so I had to go alone.

Lady Matilda's determination to convert the church into a flower-show considerably increased my labours. All her innumerable pots of daffodils had to be attended to, and the faded blossoms picked out. It took me a good hour to make the rood

screen look anything like tidy. Then there were Aunt Sunshine's windows in the south aisle to trim up, and then I worked my way down to the font, whose tracery of delicate ivy leaf and stem looked almost as fresh as when I finished it with Mr. Forrester the Saturday before. Only a few primroses, which I had laid in amongst the moss round the base, needed replacing.

How I loved that old font. How often on sultry summer days have I gone in and rested myself upon its steps, so hollowed and worn and stained by the footsteps of generation after generation of fathers and mothers who had held their little ones there. Those old steps were amongst the very first things which Lady Matilda had wished to improve away, but my father steadily refused to let them be touched. I think he had a strong vein of sentiment in him, though it seldom worked its way to

the surface. My mother had been christened at that font, and her fore-elders before her, for centuries past, from the time when Newcourt, mossed and crumbling now amongst its elm-trees, had been built by the founder of the family. There, on those worn steps, she had stood a happy young mother to hold her first-born, my little brother Davie, to receive the name by which the angels knew him now. That was the thought in my father's heart as he said "no" to Lady Matilda's desire for polished marble with an inscription on brass, to the glory of God, and her own praise. And that would keep the steps of the old font sacred until a stranger came to do his work and take his place.

But I had other thoughts than these, as I stood by Willoughby church font on that Easter Monday morning. Its ivy tracery seemed to tell me a story sweeter than that

of the old long ago past. There was the place on the fine wrought iron-work, where I had been obliged to leave my work, and there was the very vine leaf—I could find it so easily, clear cut and life-like still, though the hand that fashioned it had been mouldering in the dust for four centuries—where I had been able to begin again, Mr. Forrester having laboured through six miles of rain and storm to bring me the materials I needed. I seemed to hear his voice again, saying as he reached the ivy branches out to me, himself still unseen,

‘There, child, I was determined you should have them.’

I was meditating upon my handiwork still, moving into place the little stems which had strayed, and trimming up the moss round the base of the font, when the curtains over the west door were put aside, and Mr. Forrester came in.

He accounted for himself in a very simple and satisfactory manner.

‘Dr. Hatherley sent down a note to say that he would like to see me again this morning, so your father has kindly arranged to drive me over to Burstborough, and I shall take the train from there instead of here. We are obliged to start at once, or I shall not get to the end of my journey to-night, and so I came to say good-bye to you. Mrs. Haseltine said I should find you here, and I did not like to go away without seeing you.’

‘Oh, thank you,’ I said; ‘that would have been very disappointing.’

I meant, of course, that it would have been disappointing to me, and then the thought just flashed across my mind that possibly he might suppose I meant it would be disappointing to himself. And I was not going to be such a fool as to think

that saying good-bye to me, or not saying it, could make any difference to him. So I added, hurriedly and awkwardly enough, I daresay,

‘I mean that I should have been very sorry to have found you gone. It was so kind of you to fetch these ivy-leaves. I don’t know what I could possibly have done if I had not had them.’

‘Oh! I see. Then do you want some more? I am afraid there would scarcely be time to get them this morning. If I had only known a little sooner!’

After all my trouble, I had succeeded in giving him to understand that I was only sorry for his going away earlier, because I had wanted him to make another journey to the moor hills for me. How I did wish I had the tact of ordinary girls in making myself understood!

‘I don’t want any more leaves, thank

you. I only wanted to thank you again for taking so much trouble to fetch these.'

There I stuck fast again, and Mr. Forrester seemed to find as much difficulty as myself in saying anything. If we could only have found something to argue about, much as I hated argument, it would have been such a relief. But we seemed each of us driven in upon our own personality. Mr. Forrester stood there in silence, guiding the delicate ivy stems over the ironwork where they had strayed away from it.

'You see, they look quite fresh yet,' I continued desperately, vexed with myself for feeling so awkward, and rather vexed too with Mr. Forrester for making no effort to say anything. 'I am very glad I did not do what Lady Matilda wanted, and cover the whole thing with a parasol of daffodils. That would have been quite

faded by now. And I hope you will have a good journey. We shall be very anxious to know the result of the committee.'

Still Mr. Forrester said nothing, only guided the ivy-leaves along the ironwork of the font-cover, until, slowly following the pattern, it brought him nearer and nearer to me. If he would not speak, I must say the more.

'You have no idea how beautiful our village looks at midsummer, if you are able to come then. I hope very much you will be able to come then.'

At last Mr. Forrester did speak.

'Thank you. I don't think you can understand *how* anxious I am that I should be able to come.'

Yes, I could. For had he not said that his coming depended upon his getting the mastership? and I should think anyone

might understand how anxious he was to get that.

‘I am sure I can,’ I said, promptly; ‘for, if you come to Willoughby, it means that you will come to Burstborough too. We shall all be so glad if you are the successful one.’

Mr. Forrester smiled, still quietly working away at those truant ivy stems.

‘Well, whether I come or not, I shall always have this to remember, that you have given me two of the pleasantest days I have ever spent in my life.’

As he said this, he broke away one of the ivy stems and laid it carefully in a little book which he carried in his pocket. It did not occur to me that what he said applied to myself specially—‘you’ being a pronoun which, thanks to our English lack of individuality, may refer to one or

many. I took for granted that he was thinking of Aunt Sunshine's hospitality and my mother's, on the occasion of his two visits to Willoughby. And so I replied, feeling that I was getting into smoother waters at last,

‘I am so glad if you have enjoyed it. Willoughby is a very quiet place, but I am sure anyone who likes the country must be happy here. And it is so pleasant for my father to have some one to talk to. The gentlemen about here are not very congenial companions for him. They are not particularly cultivated.’

Mr. Forrester let that pass. Then he took the bit of ivy out of the little book.

‘I wish you would give me a piece yourself, instead of this. Will you?’

I think I felt slightly vexed. It seemed as if the other end of the magnet had been held to me, and I wanted to draw myself

away from it. Mr. Forrester looked quietly at me.

‘Will you give me one?’

I broke off a little bit, my fingers shaking all the time, and held it to him, not looking him in the face, for I was still wavering between confusion and vexation. I like to know both what I mean myself and what other people mean; and now I knew nothing, except that I seemed called upon to manifest what I would have preferred keeping to myself. What right had Mr. Forrester to ask me for a bit of ivy? Did he want it as a general sort of remembrance of an interesting church? If so, why could I not have given it to him in a self-possessed and straightforward manner, instead of making a simpleton of myself by my flushed face and shaking fingers? Why need one colour such a simple thing with a personal aspect at all?

But I had so coloured it, and now I could not get back to the independent ground again. I wished I could have swept away the font and the ivy-leaves and Mr. Forrester and everything, and been just my own self, answerable to nobody.

With a desperate effort at appearing as if nothing was the matter, I gathered up my basket and scissors and the rest of my things, and made for the door.

‘There is no hurry,’ said Mr. Forrester, as I fumbled in vain at the big key which would not move for any efforts of mine.

With most quiet, leisurely deliberateness, he adjusted the stem of ivy in the little book, put the book in his pocket, picked up the bit of ivy which he had first broken off, and, giving it to me, said,

‘Keep that until I come again.’

Then he moved my useless hands away, opened the door, put me through, locked

it after us, and, without another word, we came quietly home; I for my part feeling thankful enough that the distance was so short, though truly that fifty yards seemed more like a mile, so strange a tumult of thought had taken possession of me.

How thankful I was when the narrow winding walk brought us in sight of the rectory porch, where my father and mother and my sister Anne were standing, the pony-trap there too, and my father holding the reins in his hands. What a relief to feel oneself once more within the magic band of home. It was as if a dream had broken.

And yet not broken, for there was Mr. Forrester close by me, nearer than father or mother or sister.

‘There is no hurry,’ he said. And, as he said it, he came nearer still, instead of measuring a good distance between us, as

I would fain have done when once we had come in sight of the porch. I remember now the wistful look upon my mother's face. Or was it only anxiety that Mr. Forrester should be in time for his appointment with Dr. Hatherley? For my mother was the very soul of punctuality. Never bustle or hurry or disorder over any departure whose management was entrusted to her.

So the good-byes were said, and Hector shook his bonnie black mane, and the little trap and my father and Mr. Forrester were soon out of sight. We stood and watched for them again where the bend of the road curved out across the moor hills, beyond the Hall plantations. We could not tell if they saw us, they were too far away. My mother spoke no word, only as if unconsciously drew a little nearer to me, and I felt her hand upon my shoulder. It

was Anne who said, as we all three stood there in the porch,

‘I do hope that Mr. Forrester will get the appointment.’

CHAPTER XV.

AND he did. Towards the end of the week, there came a telegram to my father, just containing the one word,

‘Successful.’

And a few days afterwards we read with due pride the following paragraph in the *Burstborough Chronicle*, our leading daily paper :

‘We have much pleasure in stating that Mr. Michael Forrester, at present of the Polwick Grammar School, has been appointed to the second mastership of Burstborough College, vacant by the resigna-

tion of the Rev. Arthur Connalt, that gentleman having accepted the vicarage of Lesser Bollington, Westshire. Mr. Forrester was educated at Kesselby Grammar School, obtained a Clare scholarship, graduated with honours, and, upon his removal from Cambridge, undertook a junior mastership at Polwick School, where he has remained until the present time. The college is to be congratulated upon the election of a man of sound classical learning, who unites with his ability as a teacher that public spirit which will find ample scope in the philanthropic enterprises of the town. Mr. Forrester enters upon his duties in September next.'

'A very neat little paragraph,' remarked my father. And then I cut it out and laid it away in my desk, no one else wanting it.

So then there was the summer visit to be looked forward to, and the establish-

ment of our new acquaintance as a comparatively near neighbour, Burstborough being only seven miles away by the road.

That was pleasant, all more distinctly personal considerations apart. For I knew how my father would enjoy having some one within reach with whom he could converse freely upon subjects of more than passing interest, and in whom he could find intellectual sympathy when wearied with the details of parish work.

And really now these details were often made a weariness to him. As time wore on, Lady Matilda amply justified the forewarnings which Aunt Sunshine gave of her character and behaviour. She was, in fact, the very spirit and boiled-down essence of all the Public Worship Regulation Acts which ever fermented in the brain of a Cabinet Minister. I believe, if the book-markers hung down an inch or two

lower over the lectern frontal than usual, she took it as an indication of Ritualistic tendencies. If my father ventured upon the use of the word 'priest' in explaining from the pulpit any of the rites and ceremonies of the church, she was sure to drive down the very next morning, and spend at least a good hour in endeavouring to convince him that the word was now obsolete as regarded our English Establishment. And when my sister Anne, who was as innocent as a new-born babe of anything like sympathy with Romanising innovations, put a cross of maiden-hair fern and purple pansies in front of the east window on Whit-Sunday morning, the face that bent down upon us from under her ladyship's bonnet during the service might have sent a nervous person into fits. So might the tones of her ladyship's voice as she encountered us in the churchyard path, having sent

Mr. Rakeridge on in advance that she might have the ground all to herself.

‘My dear Miss Haseltine! And the Church of England seething in tumult as it is at the present moment. Why, have you not read how the parish of St. Modwena, in the Burstborough archdeaconry, is up in arms for no other reason than that the rector insists upon a cross upon the communion-table? And the churchwardens, being of the opposite opinion, have taken it down; very properly too, as I consider, and I should feel it my duty to ask Mr. Rakeridge to do the very same thing if anything of the sort were permanently introduced into my parish church. Do, my dear girl, just take it quietly away before any unpleasant feeling is stirred up. I should be so grieved to have to call upon the rector about it.’

Down came Anne’s pretty little fabric of

pansies and maiden-hair, for we knew too well by now what a call upon the rector meant, and how it often worried my father for days; and I would not, for all the crosses in Christendom, have seen that harassed look upon his face if any amount of giving-in upon my part or Anne's could have prevented it. Worry took more out of my father, ten times more, than actual work.

Then Lady Matilda was consumed, no other word expresses it, by a passion for re-organising everything. She would have re-organised the rector himself, if she could. The day-schools were to be taken to pieces, turned inside out and upside down, and re-made upon an entirely different pattern. Then the Sunday-schools followed, because, as she said, we had no system. For her part, she considered that a Sunday-school never accomplished its purpose until the

children obeyed the superintendent's bell as immediately, and accurately, and mechanically as that bell obeyed the hand that commanded it. So we spent well-nigh a month of afternoons and mornings, Sunday after Sunday, in practising obedience to this said bell, until her ladyship considered us perfect. We entered the school, we left it, we knelt down to say our prayers, we rose when they were done, we found our hymns, opened our Bibles, marked our class-books, said our lessons, stood up and sat down, in truth, almost breathed to the sound of that bell; and, once a month, Lady Matilda had a meeting of us all, teachers I mean, to rehearse the performance, she ringing the bell herself that we might quite understand what to expect from our scholars. I do not believe anything ever gave her more satisfaction than to put us through these exercises. It was

so like being colonel over a regiment, and Lady Matilda had the make of half-a-dozen colonels in her.

Then there was the blanket-club to be reorganised, and the Women's Provident Society, and school children's pence club, and the Penny bank ; and when all that was done, she wanted the rectory house reorganised, with a separate kitchen place from which soup might be given out, instead of the people fetching it from the Hall. She was sure it could all be built and finished during the summer, and then we would start the soup-making in November, and it was to be given out every day after morning prayers, because of course by that time we should have daily prayers, every church ought to have them ; and no one was to have soup who had not been to the prayers first. And these prayers were to be said upon a certain note, but not so as

to give an impression of intoning, because intoning was a practice against which she had distinct religious scruples.

And then would my father mind wearing a surplice just a trifle wider in the sleeves? She had happened to pick up one of those dreadful ritualistic ecclesiastical tradespeople's catalogues, illustrated, and the pattern supplied to the extremest London church was identical with that hanging up in the Willoughby vestry. My father must excuse her, for she hoped she was a genuine churchwoman, sound to the very core, and if he would not mind a slight difference in the cut it would be such a relief to her. She would with the very greatest pleasure order down a couple of new ones from town at her own expense.

My father agreed, but only to the difference of cut, not to being dressed at

Lady Matilda's expense. He was not a man who fidgetted over trifles. I think, however, if he had stood out about it, Anne and I would privately have introduced an extra quarter of a yard into the surplice sleeves, and trusted to masculine indifference for the addition never being noticed, such misery were we already brought into by Lady Matilda's anxiety for the interests of religion in the parish.

Then we two girls came in for our share of reorganisation. Could we not get up something now and then by way of entertainment in the school-rooms? The young ladies of the rectory, when there were any, were always looked to, to take the lead in that sort of thing. If people were not amused, they drifted away to Dissent. A penny reading now and then, or a concert, or an exhibition, or a bazaar was a capital thing for gathering parish interest into a

focus. The time was past, she said, when a clergyman's family could be inactive. They must rouse themselves and move with the movement of public opinion. Every effort must be put forth, for the demon of Disestablishment was stalking abroad, and unless the clergy, and their wives and daughters too, were alert upon their watch-tower, the clock of the ages—for Lady Matilda had a fine command of metaphor—would sound the knell of the Church's doom, and we should awake too late, and find that neither penny readings nor surplices would save us from being reduced to the level of a sect, a mere bit of brick, as she might say, in the great pyramid of truth, instead of its foundation and corner-stone.

So that now we really dreaded a call from Lady Matilda, and would gladly have fled into the uttermost parts of the parish

when we saw her carriage turning round that bend in the road which led to the rectory and nowhere else.

It was a relief to have Seline's arrival to think about. That event was drawing very near. Everyday we looked in the mail and shipping news for the landing of the *Tussorah* at Brindisi. As soon as that was announced, father was to go to London to be in readiness to receive our young guest, and, after two days' rest there, she was to come down to Willoughby.

Of course Anne and I were in a state of great excitement about her coming. Not that we were exactly overjoyed at the prospect of her permanently remaining with us. We were content amongst ourselves. Seline was a stranger, who might or might not fall in with our quiet ways. Our interest was, I may say, purely benevolent. We knew well enough what

our own state of mind would have been had our father been summoned into action thousands and thousands of miles away, and had we been unable to hear from him except at distant intervals; we knew what a torture life would have been for us were we unable to minister in any way to his comfort, unable to receive his last words if dying, or to drop a tear upon his grave if he were laid in a distant land amongst strangers. Such a trouble coming into our quiet lives would crush us to the dust, and I, for my part, doubted not it would have the same effect upon Seline. She was coming to us in her anxiety and loneliness. We must be very tender with her, we must comfort and console her. The shadow of orphanhood was hanging over her. A demon more terrible than that of Disestablishment was stalking

abroad. She might any morning take up the daily paper, and, glancing her eye down the column from the seat of war, read there the news of her father's death.

‘But we will never let her get hold of the paper until we have looked it through ourselves. It would be too dreadful for her to find out anything in that sudden way.’

I said this to my mother and Anne one day, as we were all three busy in the dining-room, making up a large, soft cushion to be placed in the easy-chair in Seline's room. The *Tussorah* had been telegraphed from Brindisi the day before. My father had left for London the same evening, and any post might bring a letter from him to say by what train we were to expect them.

‘We must give the station-boy special instructions,’ Anne said, ‘not to give the paper into any hands but ours. Don’t you remember Mrs. Dumble’s picking it up when she was here as cook, and finding out the death of her brother at the Cape, and how she went into hysterics and shrieked, and we had such a business to get her round?’

‘Yes,’ I replied; ‘and, after all, it was nothing of the sort. She had got hold of the wrong list, and, instead of being killed and wounded, he was amongst those who were coming home in the next troopship. What an amount of feeling was wasted upon that occasion! But I am very sorry for poor Seline, for we know that her father *is* in real danger. She can never have a moment of comfortable peace. Do you think she can, mother?’

‘I would not say so much as that,’ re-

plied my mother. 'You have not been accustomed to military life, and you cannot quite understand how suspense which would be dreadful to most people comes to be accepted as a matter of course, a sort of necessary condition.'

'Then do you think, mother,' said Anne, 'that Seline will not be so very unhappy, after all? Do you think we may talk with her just as if she were in ordinary circumstances like ourselves?'

'I am sure you may talk to her as if she were in ordinary circumstances. Indeed, that will be the best thing for you to do. And a soldier's daughter has a pride in feeling that her father is doing his duty, however much it takes him into the midst of danger.'

'Yes, of course,' Anne replied, dubiously, 'though I do not think that would comfort me so very much, when

I knew that the Afghans were down upon him.'

'No,' I said, 'but I wish we could make it comfort us when we know that Lady Matilda is down upon him. I am sure she is as terrible as the Afghans. Perhaps when Seline has been with us a little while she will wonder that *we* can be so bright and cheerful when our father is engaged in such a conflict with the parish frontal tribes. But yonder comes the postman. Now, has he anything for us?'

Yes, there was a letter from my father to say that the *Tussorah* had arrived, I mean that the mail train bringing its passengers had reached London safely; that he had met Seline and taken her to the hotel, and that on the next day but one they should come to Willoughby. He told us nothing about her, except that she had had a plea-

sant voyage, and did not seem any worse for it; so we were left as much as ever to our own imaginings.

CHAPTER XVI.

SELINE arrived ; the daintiest little bundle of soft, warm sealskin from top to toe that one could imagine : sealskin hat, sealskin muff, sealskin coat down to the very tips of her toes ; no face, in the gloom of that late April evening, to be discerned outside, as we three women-folk crowded into the hall to receive her. Only, as my father lifted the bundle down, the carriage-lamp flashed its light up into a pair of lovely brown eyes, and so guided us as to the whereabouts of the face which we were all waiting to kiss, the face of our poor little motherless guest who might so soon be fatherless too.

‘This is Auntie Phyllis,’ she said, putting up a cheek as soft and downy as the sealskin muffled round it: ‘and this is Anne, and this is Marjorie. It is so good of you to have me. No, I am not a bit tired, thank you, for Uncle Davie has taken such good care of me, only it is so cold. I have been perished with cold ever since we turned out at Brindisi. Oh, you dear, delightful fire! What a treat it is to see you.’

For we had now talked ourselves into the drawing-room, where a great easy-chair had been dragged up for her to the very edge of the fender. She made straight for it, just as a bird makes for its nest, and gathered herself up amongst its cushions and reached a fan which was lying conveniently at hand to screen her face from the flames.

‘I do like the way they make fires here

in England. It does one good even to look at them. On board ship we had such stupid little match-boxes of grates. One might as well try to warm oneself at a picture. But it won't be like this very long, will it? I mean the cold.'

And then she crossed her little feet on the fender, and threw her gloves on the hearthrug, and her satchel somewhere else, and tumbled off her hat, so for the first time giving us a really good view of the features under it.

Seline was a very pretty girl, not to go farther and call her beautiful. I never like to call a face beautiful until I know something of the character which shines through it. She had that clear, distinctively brunette complexion which leaves no doubt as to what colours best become its possessor. In that respect she was much better off than either Anne or myself,

whose complexions, though clear and agreeable enough, were of that betwixt and between type, which goes tolerably well with everything, but supremely well with nothing. Now, when Seline had tumbled off her hat, she proceeded to tumble off her jacket, and in so doing brought to light a bunch of yellow jonquils carelessly thrust into the fastening of her dress; and the way that bit of yellow harmonised with the cheek and chin that came into contact with it was just a wonder and a delight to behold. If I could have been envious upon such a short notice, I think envy would have been almost a justifiable feeling. But I can honestly say that as I knelt there upon the hearthrug, looking up into Seline's face whilst I unbuttoned her boots for her, and gathered together the various articles which she kept flinging aside, I was conscious of nothing but plea-

sure. The pity which I had expected to feel on account of her peculiar circumstances was nowhere.

When she had got rid of her hat, one might have thought that a handsome lad of fourteen or fifteen had come to stay with us. She wore her dark hair cut quite short, except in the front, where it curled and fell over loosely until it almost touched her fine, well-marked eyebrows. Her face was lively and intelligent, the eyes having well the upper hand in the impression it made upon you. They were large, bright, well set, with such long dark lashes. I could fancy there was any amount of fun and mischief in those eyes. They might also look lovely behind a mist of tears, as dark eyes with long lashes do ; but there were no tears dimming them now, nor even shadow of thought or memory. The firelight, or the light of her

own content, just flashed and sparkled in them. For the rest of her face, when those eyes released you from looking into them, you felt it was dainty and well-bred and charming. The nose had the prettiest little upward tilt, the mouth was small and full of expression, the upper lip short and saucy, just falling a little over the lower one when the face was at rest, which, truth to say, it seldom seemed to be, so rapidly did even thought, as well as speech, play to and fro upon it.

‘It is really too good of you,’ she said, when I had got the boots unbuttoned, and the slender, finely-curved feet put into a pair of loose slippers ever so much too large for them, though the smallest I had. ‘It is so nice to be waited upon again. And oh, auntie dear, have you really brought me a cup of tea? That is a treat.’

For my mother, thinking that this would warm her more effectually than anything else, just to begin with, had ordered tea to be prepared, and had brought it to Seline herself, for somehow we did not want hireling hands to do anything for her just yet. We wanted her to feel that she was to be received, cared for, watched over by ourselves.

‘It is good of you, auntie,’ she said, just reaching out her hand for the cup, and then another hand for the biscuits which Anne was holding. ‘I have been dreaming of a cup of tea with real country cream in it, ever since I knew I was coming to stay with you. In India one never gets cream worth anything. You know they can’t keep the milk, or whatever it is, long enough. This is delicious.’

The mention of India gave us courage to ask, though with a mixture of fear and

trembling, if she had good accounts of her father.

‘Oh! yes, thank you,’ she replied, very cheerfully. ‘He was all right last time we heard. You know we don’t get letters very often; but the telegrams used to come down every day. Dear old dad! He just sent a few lines to be ready when we landed at Brindisi.’

‘What a relief that must have been,’ I said. ‘It was such a long time, all the way from Bombay to Brindisi without any word at all. You could not tell what might have happened.’

Anne gave me a warning look. We had agreed that we would not say anything, at any rate not just at first, that might lead her mind to dwell upon Major Consett’s perilous position.

I caught myself up, feeling very uncomfortable. I never could say the right thing

at the right time. And to say it at the wrong time was worse than not saying it at all. But Seline did not betray any emotion. She took another biscuit from the plate which my sister was holding.

‘Forgive me for picking out the almond ones. I am so fond of them. I don’t think anything particular has happened yet. I hope our men will give those fellows a good dressing before they have done with them. I felt quite glad when I found there was a chance at last of our having a brush with the Afghans.’

This was unexpected, but the cheerfulness might be only on the surface. Still I felt bound to enter some sort of a protest.

‘Oh, Seline! Do you mean to say you are really glad it has come to fighting?’

‘Yes—why not? Marjorie, you have no idea what a state everything had got into with such a long dull, sleepy time.

There was no such piece of luck as a promotion. Why, papa will be a colonel now in no time. I do so want him to be that. Everybody says a campaign like this is the very thing we want.'

'Yes, but then when one's own people have to be in it?'

'Oh! well, in this kind of fighting, you know, it is not so much the officers who get picked off. It is chiefly the rank and file. I suppose papa sits in his tent most of the time writing letters, unless he may get a little hunting now and then.'

I began to think we might relax our vigilance about the morning papers.

'The hunting, you know, is splendid up there. I hope papa will be able to get me some tiger-skins. Of course, it only lasts until the cold weather, but I daresay the campaign will be over by then, and he will be able to come home. Those black

fellows ought not to give our men a great deal of trouble. Marjorie, may I have some more cream? I never tasted anything so refreshing as this tea.'

I emptied half the contents of the jug into her cup. Clearly we were not to mingle our tears over any possible harm which might happen to Major Consett in the discharge of his duties.

My mother, who had been silent during this conversation, now changed the subject.

'Did you have a pleasant voyage, Seline?'

'Oh, yes, auntie, thank you.'

And smiles, evidently born of some amusing memory, began to chase one another over Seline's face.

'You know it wasn't quite such fun as it might have been, for as soon as ever the frontier business began they stopped all the leave. The officers who were on fur-

lough had to show up again, and a great many who were just coming home had to give it up, like papa, and send their wives and children home instead, so we had no end of ladies on board the *Tussorah*. I don't suppose there were more than twenty men altogether, and of course that made it rather dull. But I am a good sailor, and I got on very comfortably.'

'I am glad of that,' said my mother. 'And then there was the lady who was taking you under her charge. You would be with her most of the time.'

'Mrs. Macallister, and Seline shrugged her shoulders with the funniest little air of being bored even with the mention of that lady's name. 'Oh! I didn't see very much of her. She was nearly always down in her cabin. We were the best of possible friends at Lahore, where I was staying with her just before we started, and I am

sure I thought we should have got on very well together, but she was always pulling me up about something or other—at least, when she was well enough to be on deck at all, and I soon got tired of it.’

‘Tired of what?’ asked my sister Anne, innocently, not comprehending the situation at all. At that stage of our experience, we had neither of us come into contact with girls for whom a quiet, uneventful life, like our own, was not sufficient.

Seline shrugged her shoulders again, and an amused laugh curled and rippled all over her face.

‘Tired of being pulled up, being always scolded, I mean, for wanting to have a little fun. Why, with a hundred and fifty wives and daughters, and not more than twenty officers, she might have been sure it was dreadfully dull. We used to have

dances, you know, on deck every evening ; and I am very fond of dancing, and I was not going to sit out to let the married ladies have the chance of a partner. You know, with such an army of women, and only twenty partners for them, a good many had to sit out, but I was not going to be one of the many.'

'I think you ought to have drawn lots,' I said, gravely.

'Drawn lots for partners? no, indeed. I used to go in for every dance regularly, and I could not have done that if we had drawn lots. But, most fortunately for me, Mrs. Macallister turned out a dreadfully bad sailor. Every time there was the least bit of a breeze, she used to disappear, and oh ! the groans I was treated to when I went down to the cabin. You know we shared a cabin, but I assure you I did not spend any more time there than was ab-

solutely necessary. Of course, when she was ill, she could not pull me up about anything, and I enjoyed myself immensely. Sometimes as many as fifty ladies would disappear, and then we had much pleasanter dances.'

'Poor Mrs. Macallister!' said Anne. 'And did she have to lie there in the cabin all by herself?'

Seline put down her cup and saucer. I think she did not quite appreciate the point of view from which we looked at the subject.

'I suppose you think I ought to have hung over her with basins and smelling-salts, and that sort of thing. Oh! dear, no. On board ship we leave that to the stewardess. It is the kindest thing you can do to let people alone when they are sea-sick. They are so miserable that, if you made yourself a perfect martyr to

them, they would never know it ; so where is the use ?’

‘ Seline, what a utilitarian you are,’ I remarked.

‘ A what, Marjorie ?’

‘ A utilitarian. Do you always consider only how much profit a thing will bring ?’

‘ I don’t know what you mean. But I do know it is not a bit of use trying to be kind to people when they are sea-sick. It is a most useless waste of good intentions. No, I used to look upon Mrs. Macallister’s disappearance as a most agreeable relief, and I enjoyed the dances in her absence as much as I could. Besides, you know, it was very much owing to papa’s recommendation that Captain Macallister got his promotion last year, so that there was not such a very great obligation on my part. Marjorie, are you a moral philosopher ?’

‘About as much so, perhaps, as you are a utilitarian. I am not quite sure whether I should like to have my debts paid by my father in that way, but then I have never had a Mrs. Macallister to pull me up.’

Seline showed such a pretty row of little pearly teeth as she laughed at me.

‘I don’t think anyone would ever have pulled *you* up. Some people don’t give half so much trouble as others. I used to have some real downright scoldings from Mrs. Macallister, and she threatened to write to papa, and all sorts of things. But I don’t believe she ever meant to do anything of the sort. And dear old dad wouldn’t have made a fuss about it, even if she had. Auntie, what time is breakfast? May I go now?’

‘Breakfast, my dear child!’ said my mother, ‘why, there is dinner to come first. We put it a couple of hours later

this evening, as we thought you would be hungry after your journey.'

'Oh! yes, and so I am, ever so hungry. Only I thought perhaps you would let me have it up in my own room to-night, and then I shall not have the trouble of making a toilette. It is such a nuisance unpacking all your things when you are tired.'

'Certainly, then you shall have it brought up. I wonder what you would like.'

'Oh! please don't ask me what I should like.' And Seline began to look about for her gloves, hat, boots, satchel, and other things. 'I think it is ever so much nicer not to know what it is going to be. And, Marjorie, you will help me to unpack to-morrow, won't you? I have only brought just a few things, because all the heavy luggage had to be sent by Southampton; and oh! auntie, I have got the very loveliest bits of embroidery for you from papa.

You know the wallahs are all coming down into the stations with it, as they don't like to be travelling over the passes into their own country now that the fighting has begun. Good-night; I must begin to-morrow to tell you all about everything.'

And, putting up her soft saucy lips to be kissed by each of us in turn, Seline managed to scramble up her scattered belongings, and I led the way, thinking my own thoughts, to that cosy little dressing-room over the porch.

CHAPTER XVII.

SHE was in the hall, chirping to the parrot, when I came downstairs next morning. I thought I had never seen a more charming picture than she made in her closely fitting brown dress of some soft, clinging material which she told me was 'melida,' with a bunch of daffodils thrust loosely into the collar of it. One might think they had grown there of their own accord, so prettily did they peep out and caress the soft white throat. If I had wanted to put a finish to my toilette with flowers, I might have pinned and pottered for half-an-hour,

and made a failure of it after all. Seline just caught sight of the daffodils, as I opened the door to let in the fresh morning air.'

'Oh! delightful. That is just the very bit of colour I want.'

And away she went, Polly looking very disappointed at the desertion, tore up a handful of the blossoms, pushed them into her dress at hap-hazard, and came back into the hall a perfect picture of light and colour and warmth.

'I suppose you are very fond of flowers,' I said, as we went into the morning-room for breakfast.

'Oh! yes,' she replied, 'I cannot live without them, I did miss them so on board. Of course you know one cannot get anything to live in the midst of the sea-air. I never feel that I am properly dressed without a flower. If I cannot have one, I have to be content with a knot of yellow ribbon

instead, but it isn't half so pretty, you never get such a perfect colour in ribbon. I hope the daffodils last a good long time. Mr. Barrington sent me in a bunch of them as soon as we got to the hotel. I suppose he knew that colour suited me, and I determined I would never be without them again as long as they could be bought.'

'I daresay we shall have them until well into the middle of May, and then the pheasant-eye narcissus comes, which I think is still more beautiful.'

'Is that yellow?' asked Seline, eagerly ;
'I never heard of it.'

'No, it is the very purest white, with a crimson-scarlet circle in the middle. I never saw a white so perfectly lovely. And the flower looks down from its stalk so wistfully, as if it were searching for something far off. We call it the blessed damozel, because it always reminds us of

Rossetti's maiden looking down from heaven for her lover.'

'How very curious! If it is white, with that scarlet centre, I shall be able to wear it. A perfect white with a touch of colour suits me very well. But yellow is my favourite.'

I felt just a little pinch of disappointment. I was going to ask Seline if she would come and see my garden before breakfast, as the morning was so bright; my own bit of garden down by the shrubbery, where I had all the old-fashioned flowers that I could collect. But somehow I did not like the idea of my pets being admired and appreciated only in so far as they were suitable to a certain tone of complexion. I do not think, however, that she would have cared to go, for just then she caught sight of the fire in the morning-room, and darted away to that as eagerly

as a minute before she had set off after the daffodils.

She kissed my mother, and dropped into a little heap on the hearthrug, her bright, pretty head rising so blossom-like from the soft brown colouring round about her. When my father came in she did not make any pretence of rising, but just stretched out her arms, and held up her face for a caress. So also when Anne came in. Our little lady was one who liked to be comfortable. But then there was such a grace and spontaneousness in everything that she did.

We went into the drawing-room after breakfast, for there was an abundant supply of easy-chairs there, and the room was full of sunshine, and Seline said it was no use troubling about unpacking her things and arranging them until the heavy luggage had arrived from Southampton. It

was good to see how she enjoyed our English firesides, with their amplitude of hearthrug and cushioned convenience.

Anne suggested a walk round the garden.

‘Oh! no, thank you. It is too perfectly delightful here. I don’t care very much for a garden until I can lie about in it like a lizard. It is better looked at through a window at this time of the year. Have you much glass here?’

I did not even know what she meant. People in the country had not then begun to class greenhouses under this generic term. Seeing that Anne and I looked puzzled, she proceeded to explain.

‘I thought you always called it so—I mean conservatories, and that sort of thing. I did so admire those big conservatories as we drove about the west end of London. I told Herbert Barrington that I thought to be a *budgeregar*, and spend one’s life in

a London conservatory, amongst azaleas and orange blossom, must be the very height of enjoyment.'

Who was this Mr. Barrington? I wondered, but did not like to ask. He had been once before mentioned. And as little did I know what a budgeregar meant. I did venture to ask that.

'Oh! budgeregars are those lovely little green and purple birds, almost like flowers themselves, that we used to have out in India. I believe they properly belong to Australia, but we can keep them about Lahore. There were some of them under glass, amongst the flowers at Covent Garden, and they did look so happy. Is that a railway man coming, with such a big parcel?'

And Seline leaned as far as she could out of her easy-chair to watch a shiny cap that was in sight above the laurels.

‘It is so nice to see the railway men come with their parcels. I had ever so many whilst we were in London. I wonder is this my new hat. Oh ! Marjorie, I did buy such a pretty hat in Regent Street ; but the colour was not exactly right, and they had to alter it, and they promised I should have it that same evening and it never came, and poor dear Mr. Storridge went telegraphing up and down about it, and there was no end of trouble. Poor little man ! I am sure he was very good. The parcel *is* coming here, Marjorie. I do hope it is going to be my hat.’

No, it was not the hat ; but it was something almost as interesting, and for Seline too. A box of the most absolutely beautiful hot-house flowers I had ever beheld—cactus, tuberose, Japaneselily, golden orchids which looked more like living crea-

tures than blossoms. Oh! what a glow of colour and a glory of perfume poured out upon us as Seline undid the fastenings of that box, and tumbled its treasures upon the hearthrug.

She gave the queerest little grunt of disappointment.

‘What a plague that it isn’t the hat! I must send a note to my good little civilian, and tell him to go and look after it for me. And where did these things come from, I wonder?’

Seline turned over the lid of the box to look at the address again, but nothing was to be gathered from that, only the name and address of the florist in Covent Garden.

‘They must have been tolerably expensive,’ she said, carelessly. ‘These things don’t grow out of doors in England, I suppose?’

‘Out of doors, Seline! I should think they don’t,’ said I, burying my face in the midst of a delicious cluster of tuberose which seemed to be like all the indolent languor and luxury of the east, gathered into one heart of perfume. ‘And these orchids, why, in London they must be almost worth their weight in gold. I know what orchids are, for Lady Matilda has some in the greenhouses at Willoughby Hall, and she told me herself how much she had been obliged to pay for them. One of them was just like this, deep purple, with the golden centre.’

‘And what did it cost?’

‘Well, I forget exactly, but a great deal, a *very* great deal. Something like ten guineas for the root, and you know they don’t have many flowers. I think this one of Lady Matilda’s was only to have a single bloom.’

‘Ridiculous,’ said Seline. ‘And down in the valleys, amongst the hill-stations in India, you give a coolie a few pice and he will climb a tree and bring you as many as you like. You simply tear them away from the moss which grows on the boughs. Fancy that.’

Just then I picked out another, golden yellow with spots and pencillings of brown, the very tint for Seline to wear. As I lifted it, a card fell out which I handed to her.

‘Now you will know where they came from,’ I said, with a pardonable touch of curiosity.

‘With Mr. Herbert Barrington’s compliments.’

Seline laughed; a merry, disdainful laugh, yet with a certain amount of satisfaction in it.

‘That everlasting Mr. Barrington!’

‘My dear Seline,’ I said, innocently, ‘he can’t be very everlasting, when you have been in England only two days.’

She twisted the card into shapes, and then flung it on the fire.

‘Oh, he was on board all the way from Bombay, you know. I rather thought at first they might have been from the other one. Marjorie dear, *will* you put them into water for me? I suppose I ought to take care of them.’

‘Ought! I should rather think you ought, indeed. Such treasures as these have scarcely ever been seen in Willoughby before. Take care of them indeed!’

Seline smiled at my enthusiasm. Having discovered the sender of the flowers, she did not seem to have much more interest in them. She settled down again in the easy-chair, and crossed her feet on the

fender, and allowed me to do as I liked with the lovely mass of colour and perfume. I fetched a jug of water and some of our deep, old-fashioned china bowls, and was soon very happily engaged in what, next to housekeeping, chanced to be my favourite occupation, the arrangement of leaves and flowers.

‘I think I do remember,’ remarked Seline, in a casual sort of way, ‘that I told him I admired orchids, so I suppose he hunted these out and sent me them. Really, if he had wished to prove his devotion, he might have done it in a more satisfactory way by going into Regent Street and telling Madame Gautier to get that hat finished and sent home without delay. I should have felt excessively obliged to him for an attention of that sort. Poor fellow!’

And Seline, idly watching me as I arranged the flowers, began to finger them again.

‘Did you say they were *very* expensive, Marjorie?’

‘The orchids are, very,’ I replied; ‘I am not so sure about the others. I know Lady Matilda gave ten guineas for a root of that purple kind.’

‘Well then, I should think they would scarcely cut a single bloom in Covent Garden for less than half-a-guinea, and here he has sent nearly a dozen of them. What unmitigated stupid men are! Stay, Marjorie, don’t you think that golden one with the streaks of brown would suit this melida better than the daffodils.’

I thought it would, and told her so.

‘Just hand it over and let me try. One would think it had been chosen on purpose to match.’

With a half yawn, as if the whole thing was a weariness, but yet must be gone through as a tribute to appearances, Seline took the brown and yellow orchid, crossed over to a little oval mirror in the corner, and began to arrange it in her dress. How pretty she looked, stepping first to one side, then to another, to get a proper light upon the flower, then mounting on a footstool for the purpose of obtaining a more complete full-length effect in the big glass over the mantel-shelf.

‘I think I will keep it in,’ she said at last, ‘it suits me very well.’

And she flung away the daffodils inside the fender.

I picked them up. I cannot bear to see flowers treated with ignominy, and I arranged them with some others in a green bowl in the window. I like flowers to be

either burnt at once or properly taken care of.

Seline laughed at me.

‘One would think daffodils were as valuable as orchids, you make such a fuss over them. It is a pity poor dear little Mr. Barrington is not here. He would be overjoyed to pick up a flower which I had worn for half-an-hour. I wonder——’

And Seline went up to the table on which I had arranged the orchids.

‘I wonder whether Mr. Barrington intends this to lead to something else. Does he mean anything by it? Marjorie, should you think he does?’

I daresay I looked stupid enough. I know I was in a dense fog of wonderment. My sister and I were not accustomed to discuss matters of this kind.

‘I really don’t understand anything

about it,' I replied at last, rather abruptly. 'I don't even know who this Mr. Barrington is.'

'Of course you do not. I forget. Well then, you must know he was one of the young civilians on board the *Tussorah*. I told you there were about twenty of them to a hundred and fifty of us ladies, and he made no end of a fuss over me. Ever so many of them did. It wasn't my fault at all. I suppose they had nothing else to do. When Mrs. Macallister was able to come on deck, she used to pull me up about it, but I believe she would have done just the same herself if she had not been shut up in her cabin so much. He was very young, and had no means of his own, and I don't suppose his pay reached three hundred a month, so that anything serious was out of the question.'

‘Three hundred a month ! Seline,’ I said, wondering what our pretty little Indian flirt would consider a competence worth grounding anything serious upon. ‘Three hundred a month ! why, that is more than three thousand a year. I had no idea people got so much in India.’

‘You little goose, I mean rupees. Everything goes by rupees there. You may call it three hundred pounds a year, if you like, but it is really not so much as that, with all the snippings and cuttings taken off. You see, Government slices away so much for pensions and that kind of thing, but I was only going to say I hope he will not come down here and be troublesome. It would be no end of a nuisance.’

‘Come down here ?’ I replied, looking more bewildered than ever. ‘Why on earth should he come down here ? We

don't any of us know him, and there is nothing special to bring strangers to Willoughby.'

'Just as if I might not be the something special myself,' said Seline, with a coquetish little smile at the corners of her lips. 'Marjorie, you are, without exception, the dearest old country mouse that ever I came across. It is perfectly delightful to talk to you. Now, I think I ought to write to my excellent Mrs. Macallister, and tell her I have arrived safely at the end of my journey.'

And Seline went.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BUT she was not far wrong in her speculations. The very next afternoon a gentleman called, requesting to see my father. We three girls were out for a walk. When we came in my mother met us, looking rather worried.

Seline had not been with us a couple of days, but I had seen that expression already several times upon my mother's face. My mother was not one who took readily to strangers. Except in the case of Mr. Forrester, who seemed almost from the very beginning to be as one of ourselves,

she required time to make up her mind about anyone. I do not think she had made up her mind about Seline yet. She was not so impatient with her as my sister Anne and I were sometimes inclined to be. She had large charity, and she could make allowance for what we, in our narrower range of experience, were perhaps apt to consider folly with a little touch of selfishness. She was wonderfully patient with Seline's demands upon the attentions of others, and upon their services too. That young lady, having been accustomed to have an ayah or a bearer to do every possible thing for her, could not understand just at first that English people of the middle classes were in the habit of taking off their own shoes and stockings, hanging up their own clothes, and putting away their own gloves and ribbons and handkerchiefs, and such small things. And as

we did not like to introduce this idea into her mind too suddenly, and it did not seem to come to her by instinct, we had ourselves to do a great deal of fetching and carrying and lady's-maid's work, in order that everything might go smoothly. My mother kept her temper beautifully. I have seen her go round the room after Seline had left it, putting things in their places and clearing away ends and oddments, with never a word of impatience. But now something seemed to have really ruffled her.

‘Seline,’ she said, ‘Uncle Davie wants to see you in the study. Will you go to him?’

I believe Seline knew exactly what it was, though she raised her pretty eyebrows with an air of innocent surprise as she went off to my father. Anne and I settled down to our work in the drawing-room,

and my mother disappeared to take her afternoon rest.

In a very short time Seline came back to us. She did not look as if anything important had been going on. She crossed over to the most comfortable easy-chair by the fire, and curled herself cosily up amongst its cushions.

‘Now, is it not ridiculous,’ she began, after a while, seeing that we did not ask any questions. ‘To think of Mr. Barrington coming all the way down here to propose for me to Uncle Davie. I had no idea that he would have been so foolish. He might have saved himself a great deal of trouble if he had had the common-sense to ask me first what I thought about it.’

My sister Anne coloured and went on with her work in silence. As for myself, it did not so much as dawn upon me just then that a young man’s affections, or the

temporary feelings which pass for such in the present day, were under consideration. Seline was still wearing the beautiful brown and gold orchid in her dress. She kept toying with it, sometimes taking it out and holding it in the light.

‘It is perfectly ridiculous, and on three hundred a month, too. Why, we should have to go begging amongst all our relations. You may well look so astonished, Anne dear. I assure you I was astonished enough myself. Of course I told uncle at once that I had given him no encouragement to come forward in that way, and that there was not the slightest necessity for me to have a personal interview with him. I do dislike personal interviews of that kind. I thought perhaps when I came here there would not be any more of them.’

‘I suppose that depends upon yourself,’

I suggested, rather tartly, for I knew how my father and mother were worried by things of this kind, and the object of Mr. Barrington's visit had dawned upon me at last.

Seline laughed.

‘Marjorie, you are a second Mrs. Macallister. I always determine, when I get into a scrape of this kind, that it shall be the very last, because the getting out is so awkward. I do dislike having to meet people again, after they have been foolish in that way. I wonder if Mr. Barrington has gone. Have you seen any gentleman take his departure?’

‘Not since we have been sitting here,’ I replied.

‘Well, then, I suppose he is here still. Only think, if Uncle Davie should ask him to lunch.’

‘I don't suppose father would ask him,

under the circumstances,' said Anne, with a certain quiet dignity. 'And if he did, Mr. Barrington would not be obliged to stay.'

'I don't know,' and Seline re-arranged the flower in her dress. 'Perhaps he might think that being asked to stay at all, meant some encouragement, and no doubt the poor fellow would be ready to catch at the merest straw. I am really sorry for him. But it is his own fault. I told him all the way through I had not the slightest intention of becoming engaged.'

'Oh ! then,' I said, 'Mr. Barrington had already asked you to marry him.'

Seline looked at me with a kindly air of toleration, much as I should have looked myself at a dancing bear when it was going through its performances.

'Marjorie, what a frightfully bald way you have of putting things. You are so

very direct. No, Mr. Barrington never actually came to the point, though of course I knew what he meant.'

'And you let him go on, and you let him send you flowers.'

'Well, what else could I do? I could not tell him that I knew what he was going to say, and would save him the trouble of saying it.'

'Yes, you could, Seline, quite well. You could have made him understand it without any words at all. And he would never have sent these flowers and come himself, too, if you had not given him some sort of encouragement.'

I daresay I spoke sharply, for I felt very vexed, not only on account of the poor young man who had journeyed down from London on such a fruitless errand, but for the annoyance it would cause to my father and mother, who did not take these things

so easily as Seline appeared to do. However, if I manifested any temper, Seline was not ruffled by it. I was ignorant of the world, and she made allowances for me.

‘You are a dear, good child, Marjorie, but you have never been in society, and you don’t know what it is. You talk exactly like a Young Lady’s Guide, and very pretty it sounds ; but wait until you have to carry your own maxims into practice, and then see what sort of a success you make of it. Now do let us talk about something else. We have been serious too long. You know these things happen every day, and the world goes on as usual.’

I was silent. My thoughts went back to that Monday morning, not so long ago, when Mr. Forrester had come to me as I stood by the old font. How strangely his

words, something in his tones, had opened for me a door into the future. Did he, too, think of these things as Seline did? Was that sudden flash of consciousness which reveals the secret of a human heart, only something which ‘happens every day, and the world goes on as usual?’ I felt as if life were sinking for me to a lower moral level. I had had little opportunity of seeing people as they were. I knew nothing but of truthful living, and simple thinking. I took for granted that the great world was like my little world, that what was real to me was real to everyone. Now I was learning that Seline, a kind-hearted, well-bred, expensively educated girl, the daughter of my father’s dearest friend, took an entirely different view of things.

Other people—Mr. Forrester, for instance—might do the same. The touch of a

child's finger—a little thoughtless child—upon an electric spring may launch a great vessel out into the ocean. Might that be true of the vessel of a human love, sent out and endued into its native element by a touch as careless, as unthinking? yet, once sent forth, no return for it possible. Was Seline to teach me that I must not judge other people by myself, nor myself by other people; that I must not expect the light of my little farthing candle to direct the movements of the great world outside, or even to guide my own footsteps with any sort of security when the way began to strike out of the plain, beaten high-road?’

It was a puzzle, all a puzzle. But just then our housemaid came in to say that father wanted to see Seline again in the study.

‘I was afraid I had not come to the end

of it,' she said, clasping her hands with a pretty air of deprecation, as she got up and looked at herself in the glass before obeying the summons. 'I expect Mr. Barrington insists upon seeing me. I declare I never will bring myself into a difficulty of this kind again—no, not for fifty pounds' worth of the most beautiful orchids in Covent Garden. Anne and Marjorie, take warning by my example. Now I am going.'

'Thank you,' said Anne. 'But I would advise you to put another flower in your dress. It is scarcely kind to Mr. Barrington to wear his own colours if you are going to be a traitor to him.'

'Dear me! I quite forgot. What a very good thing that you reminded me. I should have felt so awkward if I had suddenly remembered it. Of course the poor man would take it as a token of encour-

agement. All the same, I must have something.'

And, flinging the lovely brown and gold orchid away, Seline began to poke about amongst the daffodils which I had that morning arranged in the bowl in the window.

'Mr. Storridge said he should as soon expect to see a macaw without its crest as myself without a touch of yellow somewhere, and he took care that I had plenty whilst we were those two days in London. Will that do?'

And, giving the flowers a pat and a touch, they fell into position under her pretty cheek just as if they had grown there.

'Now, good-bye, girls. And wish me well.'

Not many minutes afterwards, a gentleman whom we supposed to be this same

Mr. Barrington went slowly, with bent head, down the garden-path. Then we heard the crunching of a horse's hoofs on the road, and by-and-by we saw him again, cantering along towards Burstborough. I hope the bright sunshine and the beautiful country toned down his disappointment. I hope a loving wife waited somewhere else for him. Anne and I felt very sorry. He looked so discouraged and sad as he went away. We could tell that well enough though we never saw his face. But perhaps some young men forget trouble as lightly as some young maidens give it.

Seline did not come back for an hour or more. Then she looked as if she had been crying. She went straight to the oval mirror in the corner.

‘It has made me feel perfectly miserable,’ she said, settling the curls over her forehead, ‘and my eyes look just like boiled

gooseberries. Anne, your father has been giving me such a scolding. He told me I had no business to encourage people when I did not mean anything, and then he asked me if this sort of thing was likely to occur again in connection with any of the passengers who came home in the *Tussorah*.'

'You did tell us there was another one,' said my sister Anne, pitilessly.

'You mean Mr. Storridge. Yes, I am sure I might just as well have expected him to come down as Mr. Barrington, only he did not go to the length of sending flowers. What *can* you do?'

And Seline faced round upon us with an apparently hopeless air of perplexity, as if life and its problems were altogether too much for her.

'You can't behave yourself like a bear when people pay attention to you. Can you?'

‘Yes, you can,’ I answered, defiantly, having poor Mr. Barrington’s figure in my thoughts, as he went slowly and sadly down our garden-walk only an hour before. ‘You had very much better behave like a bear and have done with it, than go drawing people on to send you flowers, and then tell them you did not mean anything.’

‘I daresay *you* could behave like a bear without any difficulty,’ Seline replied, with that charming frankness which never gave any offence, and she crossed over and kissed me in the most affectionate manner. ‘I can fancy you keeping a whole shipload of officers and civilians at a most respectful distance, the dear little savage that you are. No, you will somehow select the right person—at least I hope you will, and you will walk straight up to each other and become engaged after a suitable interval, and after another suitable interval you

will be married, and live happily ever afterwards. You need not turn so red, Marjorie, I am a true prophet, and if I could be as sensible myself it would save a great deal of trouble. When does the Indian mail go out ?

‘Monday,’ I replied, promptly, being very glad of a change in the subject; ‘no, I mean Friday,—at least, Thursday from here.’

‘I don’t believe you know *what* you mean,’ said Seline, with a quick glance into my face. ‘Well, I shall write to papa anyway, and tell him that I am safely here, and that you have all begun to bully me. There, then. Now, don’t contradict.’

And Seline went to the little writing-table and began to pour out her feelings upon a sheet of foreign letter-paper.

She was rather subdued for the rest of the day. I fancy she must have had a second

talking-to from my mother, for her eyes bore traces of tears again when she appeared for afternoon tea. I think my father noticed this, and was sorry for her. He was a very tender-hearted man. To make things pleasant all round, he proposed that we three girls should go for a walk with him, as Seline had not yet been properly introduced to the beauties of Willoughby. We were to go through the church plantations and then round by the foot of the moor hills, where the primroses and wild anemones were now in their full beauty.

Her tears were quickly dried. My father had perhaps been more moved by them than was necessary. We were not a crying family. Something very sharp was necessary to drive any of us to that extent of outward manifestation; and doubtless, judging Seline by ourselves, he

feared his rebuffs might have produced too deep a mental disturbance.

But I wonder if any girl ever took to heart, with anything like painful penitence, a reproach for flirting. I believe the nature that could indulge in the flirting could not feel the pain. And, beneath any possible sorrow which such reproach might cause to the girl who merits it, there would be a certain little feeling of triumph in the consciousness of her power over others; and this triumph would be sweet enough to compensate effectually for the mortification of the scolding. At any rate, Seline soon recovered her spirits, and chatted away with my father as gaily as though nothing of importance had occurred during the afternoon.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON our way home, we encountered Lady Matilda. My sister Anne duly introduced our fascinating little visitor.

Lady Matilda shook off her eyeglasses with that odd grimace which was now so familiar to us, and offered a rather shabbily-gloved hand to Seline's, which was perfect in the most daintily-fitting French kid. Seline's hands and feet were always irreproachable, and I do not wonder, for the shape of them was so lovely that it would have been a sin not to have set them off to the best advantage. But the

gloves she got through! for she never mended one.

‘Ah! yes, Mrs. Haseltine told me you were expecting a young friend from India. So sorry for you, Miss Consett; you must be in such a dreadful state of anxiety. You see, the war news gets worse and worse. I think I understood that Major Consett had gone with his regiment to the front?’

Anne and I would have felt very uncomfortable, if other people had been as sensitive as ourselves; but we had learned by this time that there was no need for reticence with regard to the Afghan campaign, so we let her ladyship talk on.

‘Everyone says that it will be more serious than was at first expected. I have several cousins and nephews out there, but they don’t happen to have been sent up; and very thankful I am. You would see

by the telegrams this morning that there has been some fighting.'

'Yes, a little skirmish,' said Seline, coolly, 'and one or two of our soldiers killed. But they were only privates, you know.'

'My dear Miss Consett,' and Lady Matilda put on her eyeglasses, and proceeded to criticise our guest with a severity which might have appalled her, had she been susceptible of fear. 'I hope you remember that, though they are only privates, they have souls to be saved, and also wives and mothers, and perhaps children, to whom their loss would be a serious calamity. We are too apt to be careless in estimating any trial which does not fall upon ourselves.'

'Oh! yes, of course,' replied Seline, accepting Lady Matilda's amendment as generally admissible, but not at all painfully applicable in the present instance.

‘I suppose the garrison chaplains do what is necessary about their souls and that sort of thing. You know each regiment takes a chaplain, and there are scripture-readers as well. And as for the wives, they don’t make a very serious trouble of anything that may happen. A soldier’s widow usually marries again very soon. The loss of a private is quite a temporary affliction, I mean to his widow.’

Seline said this with perfect coolness and self-possession, though it seemed to me that the mistress of Willoughby Hall was looking down upon her from a constantly increasing height of astonished dignity and reproach. It was curious how her ladyship seemed always to expand, both perpendicularly and laterally, when she assumed her natural function as judge over the conduct of other people. I felt a pigmy when she was criticising

me. As for Seline, who was shorter even than myself, she ought in her own estimation to have dwindled down to a microbe ; but she did nothing of the sort, she toyed with the daffodil in her collar, and looked as comfortable as possible.

Lady Matilda put on an expression which convinced me that our audacious little visitor, in common with the rest of the parish, would soon have to be re-organised ; and then she turned to my father, and with a sudden abandonment of the subject in hand which would have crushed an ordinary girl to the dust, she said,

‘ Do you think you could go into the church with me for a few minutes ? Only a few minutes. I will not detain you very long. I want to show you how shamefully Dumble is neglecting those window-ledges. I have felt convinced for a long time that

he does not do his duty to them, though both he and Mrs. Dumble say that they dust the whole of the edifice thoroughly once a week.'

My father sighed, but said nothing. It was always best, in the long run, to let Lady Matilda go on.

'Now, I should say,' she continued, 'that twice a week was the very least that could keep the place in at all a proper condition for worship; but to accept his own conclusions, and to test the matter satisfactorily, I put a small leaf upon one of the window-ledges, and there it has remained for a fortnight. Of course Dumble *may* remove it and put it carefully back again when he has dusted underneath it, but I take leave to doubt that.'

'You wouldn't doubt it if Dumble was a native,' said Seline, heroically undisturbed by the manner in which Lady Matilda

had just now set her down. 'Our bearer would take any little bit of rubbish carefully up and dust under it and then put it back again. I daresay he thought you had laid it there to be taken care of.'

Lady Matilda slowly put up her eyeglass and looked, no more than that, at Seline; then went on :

'Now, if you would just come in and judge for yourself, you could speak to him accordingly. I got the keys of the church from him on purpose as I came along, as I intended to satisfy myself once more as to the dust on the ledges before I spoke to you about it. I never like to find fault without a sufficient foundation. And we are so near now that it would scarcely take you out of your way at all.'

'Oh ! *do* go in, Uncle Davie,' said Seline, not in the least embarrassed by the snubs which Lady Matilda kept giving her. In-

deed, I do believe she was 'cheeking' the mistress of Willoughby Hall. 'I should so like to see a real old English church. You know in India they are not at all pretty, and then they are so spoiled by the punkahs and thermantidotes and things, and the bearers sweep them so carefully that you can never see a spot of dust anywhere. Now I do like to see a church properly dusty. It gives such a comfortable tone to the colouring.'

Seline looked straight at Lady Matilda as she said this. I am sure she meant to be saucy, yet she did it with such a pretty air of innocence and unworldliness.

'Seline,' I whispered, as Lady Matilda, with Rhadamanthine severity continually accumulating behind her eye-glass, turned away and marched on in advance with my father, brandishing the keys as she kept laying down the law in that irritating

high-pitched voice of hers, 'Seline, *do* take care.'

'Take care what about?' she replied, stooping down a little to adjust the folds of her dress. 'Have I torn anything? This melida does catch so, if there are nails anywhere.'

'It isn't nails,' I said, still in a whisper. 'It is Lady Matilda that is so easily vexed.'

'Oh! then,' and Seline shook her dress out, 'I won't take care a bit. A nasty, mean old thing, to be putting her bits of rubbishy paper to trip people up. I wonder how you can endure her. I mean to have a good stand-up fight with her, if she goes on at me any more.'

'I think you had better let it alone,' I said. 'Power is on the side of the gods.'

'Oh! no, it isn't. At any rate not when the gods are so ugly as that. Would I

not like to make the voyage home from India with half-a-dozen Lady Matildas. They would soon find power wasn't on *their* side, at all. But still I won't say anything, if it would make things uncomfortable for *you*. I shouldn't like spectacle Matty to visit her spite upon my dear good little bear of a Marjorie.'

And Seline took hold of my hand and gently smoothed it up and down, as if it had been a nice woolly paw. I could not but laugh, though I knew that such a state of things as this would soon produce a revolution. Seline was too clever. She could pretend to be so guileless, and yet all the time give such malicious little thrusts.

We were now in the porch of what Lady Matilda called the sacred edifice. She turned the key in the lock herself, flung open the door, and marching in went straight up to the window where the bit of

leaf ought to have been. It was not there. Then she drew her finger carefully along the ledge, and examined the tips of her gloves. They were quite clean. At least as clean as before the operation, which was not saying too much for them.

‘That is *very* satisfactory,’ she said, in a tone of disappointment. ‘I am glad Dumble has begun to awaken to a sense of his duties. And now, dear Mr Haseltine, as we are here together might I take the opportunity of speaking a word to you about that strip of matting which leads up to the Hall pew? You know how much I dislike fault-finding. I am sure you know how much I dislike *that*, Mr. Haseltine.’

My father bowed his head just enough, I think, to hide a little twinkle of humour which must have broken out into a smile if he had gone on looking at Lady Matilda.

‘I really would not mention it at all, only I know that gentlemen overlook such little matters, that is, at least, if you can call anything little which appertains to a church, and which affects the comfort of the worshippers. But I am afraid, positively afraid, to let down the train of my dress as I walk over that matting. I am perfectly certain that I have seen a flea in it—a *flea*, Mr. Haseltine.’

It was my turn to be uneasy now. We were nearing the subject of Mrs. Dumble and the poultry, and I was not going to give in about having anyone else to take care of them. Yet I felt that if her ladyship turned those terrible eyeglasses upon me, I could no more show fight than a chick newly out of the shell. I was just considering how I could put in a word for my cochin-chinas and speckled Dorkings, if it did get so far as a downright

attack upon Mrs. Dumble, when Seline said, with the most charming air of ease and unconcern,

‘One flea. Oh! how thankful we should feel, out in India, if it was only one of them. I think, Lady Matilda, it would do you a great deal of good to go to India. Why, up at Ranikhet when papa was there with his regiment, and I stayed the hot weather with him, there used to be hundreds and thousands of them, and nobody thought of making any complaint about it.’

Lady Matilda turned and looked curiously at Seline, not so much in astonishment at the discreditable state of things at Ranikhet, as at the effrontery with which a young girl could state her own views and opinions respecting it. Seline returned the look with undiminished self-possession, and calmly continued :

‘Do you know? when the men stood up at the parade service on Sunday mornings, you could see the little black specks, hopping all over their scarlet coats; and the arch-deacon, when he came round on visitation, never so much as made a note of it in the church book, much less said anything to the chaplain on the subject. And the Commander-in-Chief let it alone, too. In fact, everybody let it alone. Was it not dreadful?’

I slipped away to the west door, for Seline’s audacity and Lady Matilda’s astonishment were becoming too much for my gravity. And still the girl went prattling on, though she knew, as well as any of us, what a tumult of wrath she was stirring up in the breast of our worthy feminine pope.

‘No one would ever find fault with you, Uncle Davie, about fleas, if you were a

garrison chaplain in India. I think they would more likely find fault with you if you didn't have any. One takes them for granted, you know, just as one takes worries and stupidities here, as part of the Establishment. Our old colonel used to say they were very useful in keeping the people awake.'

'The worries you mean, and the stupidities,' said my father.

'No, the little acrobats. I don't think a clergyman has so many of the worries and other things in India, as he seems to have here. And he never gets troubled about dust. This church would be considered a model of neatness. If I were you, I would keep a little more dust about, it improves the colouring. Don't you think a certain amount of dust does give a delightful tone and shadow to the stone-work?'

Seline turned to Lady Matilda, as if that

estimable person's opinion upon the subject would be really valuable.

Lady Matilda took no notice this time. She had turned away in a very marked manner, when Seline put in her word about the fleas, and she was now talking with my sister Anne about something connected with Sunday schools. She would not so much as level her eye-glass at our offending guest. But the guest was not going to be ignored in that way.

‘Don’t you *really* think, Lady Matilda, that a certain amount of dust increases the human interest of a parish church?’

Seline looked so anxious for information as she said this, that Lady Matilda was obliged to face about again. Very deliberately and with an air of great dignity she turned, and, after regarding the girl severely for a few seconds, she replied,

‘No, Miss Consett, I do not. If you wish for my opinion, I must say that I have always considered our sacred edifices as worthy of the utmost attention that can be bestowed upon them. And I am exceedingly sorry to find that those who have the direction of ecclesiastical matters in India, do not appear to be more awake to the claims of duty in this respect. You will, I hope, discover before long that public opinion in this country is decidedly more enlightened.’

‘Oh! yes, I am discovering it very nicely now, thank you. I don’t think we are at all enlightened in India. We let things go and we don’t worry at all. I mean, we don’t worry other people who are doing their best. I think it is a great deal more comfortable not to be enlightened, if it only makes you look upon the dark side of things. But I am so sorry to have dis-

turbed you as you were talking about the Sunday schools. I won't interrupt you any more.'

And with the very prettiest smile, and an inclination of her curly head which conveyed an irresistible impression of mingled courtesy and 'cheekiness,' Seline turned to my father.

'Uncle Davie, papa told me once that you had some very fine stained glass windows in your church. He remembered one particularly about St. Christopher. I don't know who St. Christopher was, but I should like to see it, for a stained glass window always makes one feel cheerful, and I do feel as if I wanted something to make me cheerful now. I am sure Lady Matilda will not mind telling you the rest about Mrs. Dumble and the matting, afterwards.'

As she said this the audacious little chit slipped her hand confidentially under my father's arm, and without any further apology to Lady Matilda, who was grasping a pew door in mute astonishment, led him away towards the west end, where the sunlight was glowing in a splendour of purple and red through the window over the old font.

My father made no resistance. I do not think he shared in my sister Anne's horror at Seline's effrontery. Indeed, he rather seemed to be enjoying the whole thing, seeing more the present fun of it than the results which it might produce upon Lady Matilda's conduct. And then any door of relief from the vexed question of Mrs. Dumble and the matting was too tempting.

I heard her ladyship say, in not a very

subdued whisper, before she returned to the subject of Sunday-school management which Seline had interrupted,

‘A rather frivolous young person, I should imagine. But I am not in the least offended, dear Miss Haseltine. Do not distress yourself. Of course she will apologise when it is represented to her that that is not the way we do things in this country. I daresay I shall have the opportunity of a quiet little talk with her before long. It is such a pity when young people err through ignorance. And now about the attention which I wish paying to that Sunday-school bell.’

Here I stepped out into the sunshine, and lost the rest. How pleasant to look away past the churchyard yew-trees to the rest and peace and stillness of our garden, where the early blossoms were just beginning to show creamy white against the

clear blue of the sky. Quiet there as yet, and room to think our own thoughts, and a place to shelter from the strife of tongues.

My father used to say sometimes that since Lady Matilda's residence in Willoughby he had been much drawn to the doctrines of Buddhism. If one could have accepted that form of religious belief, there would have been such a satisfaction in the thought that in some future state her ladyship would be born again as a clergyman in a remote country parish, and then she would know what it was to be everlastingly worried and nagged at by somebody who should be to her what she was now, probably with the best intentions, to ourselves. The Burmese little girls are encouraged to industry and good behaviour by the prospect of being born again as little boys. On the same principle might

not Lady Matilda be rewarded for her kindness in teaching us our duty, by being allowed, in one of her transmigrations, to practise in a passive form the virtues she now so diligently inculcated upon us? There are things more unlikely.

CHAPTER XX.

LADY MATILDA was still holding forth to my sister Anne about Sunday-school management. My father had finished explaining to Seline the beauties of the St. Christopher window. I was lingering about, waiting for us to get back to the rectory. Somehow we all managed to drift together in the aisle by the pulpit, close to which was our own pew, and over it, upon the wall, a handsome marble tablet, erected by the parishioners to the memory of their former rector, dear old Mr. Sandilands, as Aunt Sunshine, who remembered the par-

ish under his management, always called him.

Not that this was any sort of reflection on my father, quite the contrary, because no one recognised more than Aunt Sunshine did, the great improvements which had taken place of late years. But Mr. Sandilands was one of those kindly, genial ecclesiastics, with a smile for everyone, good and evil alike, and a fine tolerance for public-houses, and a lurking fondness for fox-hunting, and a comfortable income which he expended liberally at Christmas time in coals and beef. As for penny banks, temperance societies, week-evening services, daily prayers, and the like, he never took them into his consideration. And, as the brick-fields were not established in his time, there was no need of a curate to suggest any modern reforms.

Everyone missed his genial, rosy old

face when he was gone, and the people put up this tablet to him. The inscription was decided upon, Aunt Sunshine said, at a general meeting of the parishioners. After setting forth at some length Mr. Sandilands' good qualities, and the ancient and honourable family from which he was descended, the marble testified as follows :

He departed this life May 20, 18—,

Aged 79,

Having been Rector of this place forty-seven years.

' There the wicked cease from troubling,

And there the weary be at rest.'

Now it always did seem to me that this last quotation was a poor compliment to the parishioners, though they chose it amongst themselves. I think that after having spent nearly fifty quiet, peaceable years in such a pretty village as Willoughby, with an ample private income, a

good wife, a handsome family, and no Lady Matilda in those days to re-organise either himself or the parish, something more suitable might have been inscribed upon his monument than the implied statement that he was weary, and the people were wicked. However, there the words were, and no one, so far as we knew, had ever found fault with them, or questioned their appropriateness.

Involuntarily my father paused as we passed this tablet, and leaning his arms upon the pew-doors, for there were the old-fashioned high pews in Willoughby church in those days, murmured, as if to himself, the words inscribed upon it :

‘There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest.’

‘Oh ! Uncle Davie, dear,’ said Seline, tripping lightly up and putting her cheek almost close to his, ‘that is pretty. I

don't think I ever heard it before. Is it from Walter Scott or Shakespeare?'

Well, we *were* unfortunate this afternoon. And Lady Matilda, large as life, standing in the very midst of us. Seline had said many unwise things, but this excelled them all.

My father did not change countenance, did not even move. He just stood there, with arms leaned on the oak panelling, and head a little bent as he replied,

'No, Seline. Those words were not written by either Walter Scott or Shakespeare. They have come down to us from a far older poet, a patriarch who dwelt in the land of Uz.'

'A *what*, who dwelt in the land of *where*?' asked Seline, with the quaintest possible expression of bewilderment upon her face. 'I never heard of the place. Do tell me.'

And this was the young person whom

my sister Anne had fondly hoped might undertake the religious knowledge department in the day-schools. But I think Anne had let that hope pass from the very first.

I pulled at Seline's sleeve by way of trying to make her be quiet.

'It was Job,' I said, in a whisper, drawing her a little on one side, for I felt we were all being compromised by her ignorance. 'Don't you know that book in the Bible? You must have heard it read out in church often enough. It comes regularly in the lessons.'

'No, I'm sure I never heard of it,' replied Seline, by no means in a whisper. 'I only used to go to church once a month or so, at Lahore, and never at all in the hot weather. Very few people ever thought of going in the hot weather. You have no idea how uncomfortable it was.'

‘I am sure it must have been,’ said my sister Anne, in a sympathetic manner. ‘I should feel quite lost myself, if I did not get to church twice on a Sunday. I should not like to live in a place like that.’

Seline shrugged her shoulders.

‘Oh, I didn’t mean that it was uncomfortable not going to church. I meant that the heat was such a terrible nuisance, and the prayers always seemed so long. How the garrison chaplain managed to get through them at all, I can’t understand. I know he used to cut out as much as he could, and so perhaps that part about the land of somewhere went too. The heat was really too dreadful.’

Lady Matilda put up her eyeglass and scanned us, one and all. Beneath the severity of her gaze I felt that we were as much in fault to have a young person

staying with us who only went to church once a month, and in the hot weather not at all, as the young person herself was to live in such heathenish darkness. And then for Seline to look so comfortable and complacent about it. Something in Lady Matilda's face convinced me, though for the present she said nothing, that the very next morning she would drive down and have a long interview with my father upon the subject.

‘I think it is time for us to be going,’ said Anne, meekly. ‘We told mother we should not be away very long. Shall I take back the keys for you to Jonathan Dumble?’

‘No, thank you;’ and Lady Matilda clenched them vigorously. ‘I shall like to see Dumble myself, and have a word with him about the matting. You will add

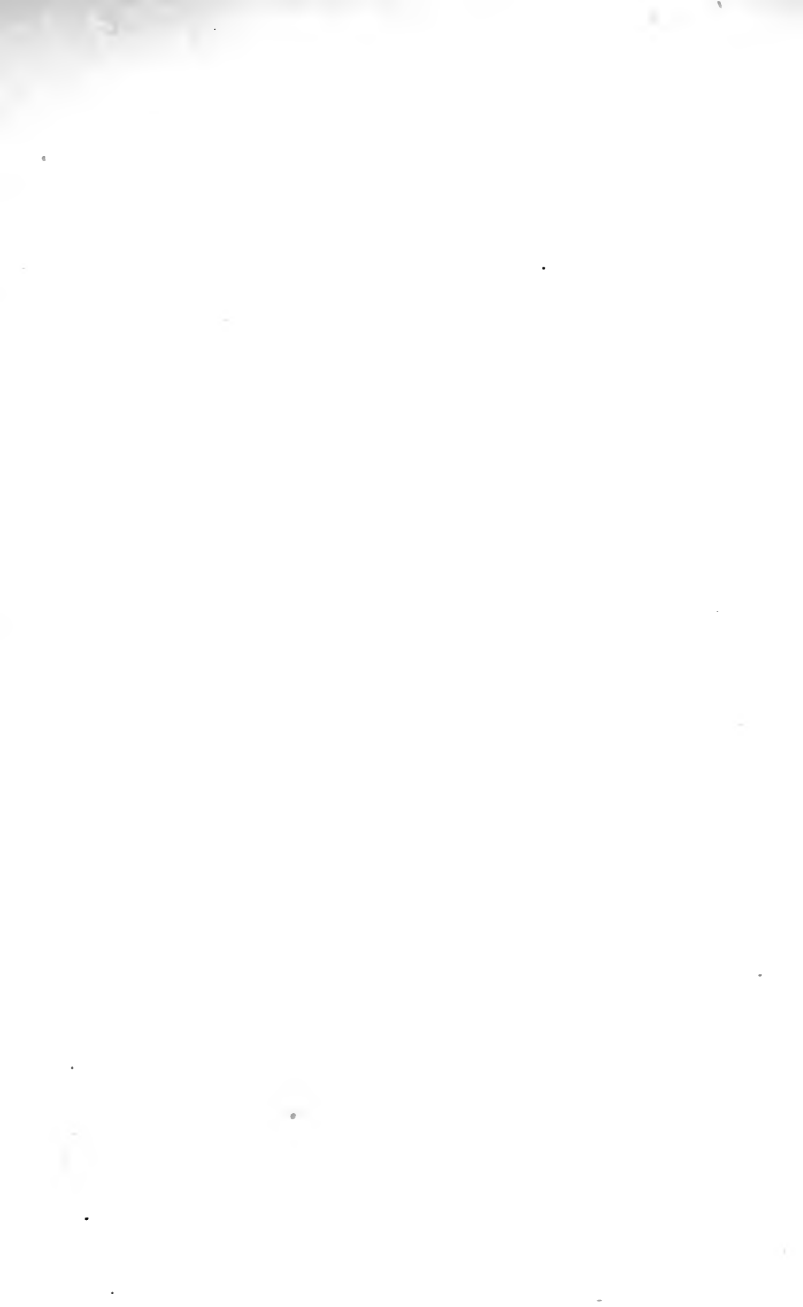
your instructions, will you not, Mr. Haseltine? I always think anything of that kind comes so very much better from the rector. And I should be so much obliged if you would urge Mrs. Dumble to be careful about the poultry. I feel certain that, being brought into such close contact with them as she is, produces great inconvenience. In fact, I should strongly advise——'

But here we had reached the vestry, from which there was a door of escape into the rectory garden. And, as another little path close to it led into the church plantations, the most direct road to the Hall, there was no rudeness in parting company with her ladyship, especially as we were expected home in good time.

So we excused ourselves, bowed, shook hands, and parted. And Seline, instead

of being in the faintest degree confounded by what had taken place, actually laughed and joked up to the very door of the house.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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